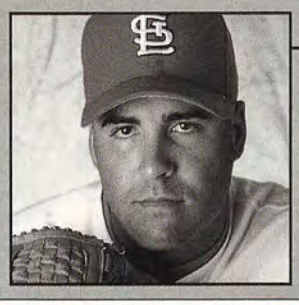

The Life and Death of
DARRYL KILE

U.S. SOCCER
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Sports Illustrated

Dale Earnhardt Jr. Leads NASCAR Nation

JULY 1, 2002 www.cnnsi.com | AOL Keyword: Sports Illustrated

It just works.

Send Attach Address Fonts Colors Save As Draft

To: switchers@apple.com

Cc:

Subject: It just works.

I've been a Windows LAN administrator (yes, Windows) for about five years now, but I recently went out and bought myself an Apple (yes, an Apple). I've been so happy with it, because it's a machine that just works, that I took some time on a Saturday afternoon to write in to Apple about why I converted from Windows to Mac.

At work, I deal with PCs all day long and I can say, without exaggeration, that keeping those Windows machines running is a constant struggle. And while I don't mind fighting with computers on my employer's time, I want to come home to something that doesn't drive me nuts. I don't have time to fool around.

I just want something that works, and that's why I use a Mac.

Aaron Adams
Windows LAN Administrator

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Aaron Adams wanted a computer that "just works," unlike the PCs he's paid to fix all day.
To learn how easy it is for you to own an Apple, go to apple.com/switch.

INTRODUCING THE

2002 SAMMY WINNERS

The Milk Mustache Campaign is pleased to introduce the "Scholar Athlete Milk Mustache of the Year" SAMMY 2002 Winners

The results are in....pictured here are the 5th annual "Scholar Athlete Milk Mustache of the Year" award winners. SAMMY 2002 recognizes outstanding scholar athletes in grade 12 from high schools throughout the contiguous United States.

Judging is based on academic performance, athletic excellence, leadership and community service. A panel of celebrity judges from the Milk Mustache Campaign – pictured to the right – chose the twenty-five (25) winners.

Each scholar athlete receives a $7,500 college scholarship, an invitation to attend an awards weekend at **Disney's Wide World of Sports™** Complex, and the opportunity to be pictured in national publications including this magazine and USA TODAY.

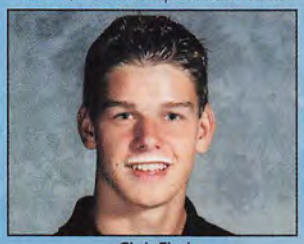
America's Dairy Farmers and Milk Processors salute these outstanding scholar athletes and look forward to introducing the SAMMY 2003 winners next year.

SAMMY 2002

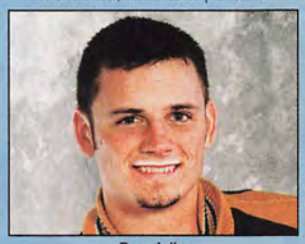
Milk is the Official Sports Training Fuel for Disney's WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS COMPLEX

Maren Marie Asay
Keizer, Oregon
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, Class Valedictorian, National Honor Society, School Newspaper Editor-in-Chief, Drama cast
Track, Cross Country
Children's race leader for Phidippides Running Club, Claggett Creek Cemetery Annual Clean-up volunteer, LDS Girls Camp Counselor volunteer

Stephanie R. Becker
Stamford, Connecticut
A average, National Merit Scholar, National Honor Society, Managing Editor of school newspaper
Tennis, Track, Soccer
Founder and President of St. Luke's Homeless Shelter Breakfast program, Red Cross Blood Drive volunteer, Christmas in April volunteer



Chris Finch
Vail, Colorado
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, NationalHonor Society, Student Council Vice President, Jazz Band member
Soccer, Ice Hockey
Colorado Special Olympics volunteer, Habitat for Humanity volunteer, Denver Soup Kitchen volunteer

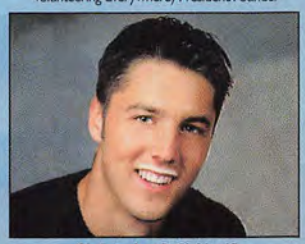


Ryan Jolley
Victor, Montana
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society, Valedictorian, Honor's Band member, National Honor Society Vice President
Basketball, Football, Track
Food Drive volunteer, volunteers to help clean the houses and lawns of widows in community and church

Laura R. Raymonds
Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin
A average, National Merit Scholar, National Honor Society, Student Council Vice President, Spanish National Honor Society
Softball, Basketball, Volleyball, Golf
Teen Court volunteer – a real legal system where first-time juvenile offenders get second chances

Julie Irene Riewerts
Hillsdale, Illinois
A+ average, National Honor Society, President of Crime Stoppers and Operation Cool, Drama stage crew
Basketball, Track, Volleyball
4-H volunteer, Teen Federation volunteer, Bethel Youth Group volunteer, WAVE (Working Adolescence Volunteering Everywhere) President/Founder

Emily M. Sidle
Arlington, Ohio
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society Secretary-Treasurer, French National Honor Society
Basketball, Track, Volleyball, Cheerleading
Hancock Youth Leadership volunteer, 4-H volunteer, American Field Service volunteer, camp counselor volunteer



Christopher P. Sighinolfi
Brewer, Maine
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society, Student Council President, Class President
Track, Swimming, Cross Country
Key Club volunteer, volunteers as a peer for one class period every other day – 2001 Peer Tutor Award

Tanisha Kimberly Tate
Detroit, Michigan
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society, Student Council Secretary, School Newspaper Business Manager
Track, Cross Country, Modern Dance
Tutors and mentors students from disadvantaged backgrounds, American Red Cross Blood Drive volunteer, Botsford Hospital Aid volunteer

Meghan Tyree
Mitchell, Indiana
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society, Student Council President, School Newspaper and Yearbook staffs
Basketball, Track, Volleyball
Special Olympics volunteer, DARE Role Model, American Red Cross Blood Drive volunteer

Hunter Benson
Little Rock, Arkansas
A+ average, National Honor Society, Student Council President and Secretary, Spanish Club
Tennis, Swimming
Initiated a grass-roots tennis program to provide inner-city youth with productive activities, Let Our Violence End (LOVE) Campaign volunteer

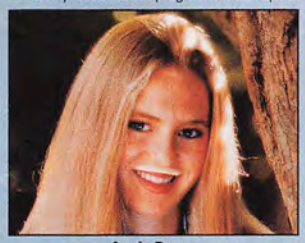
Chris Conner
Bowling Green, Kentucky
A+ average, National Merit Scholar, National Honor Society, Drama Lead Character, Beta Club President
Tennis, Soccer, Diving
Britthaven Nursing Home volunteer, Lost River Cave beautification volunteer, Alvaton Elementary Fall Festival volunteer, DARE Role model, Teen Leadership Conference

Paul Corsello
Pittsford, New York
A average, National Merit Scholar, National Honor Society, School Yearbook staff member
Swimming, Water Polo, Track
Erie Canal Old Lock 62 revitalization volunteer – wrote and published Lock 62 historical information pamphlet, Special Olympics and Habitat for Humanity volunteer, Eagle Scout

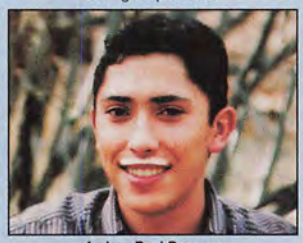
Michael Kantar
Minneapolis, Minnesota
A+ average, National Honor Society, Jazz Band member (saxophone & guitar)
Tennis
Math & reading tutor at Anderson Elementary School, art & math peer tutor at South High, Hebrew tutor, volunteer tennis instructor for the inner-city Urban Tennis program of Minneapolis

Julia M. Lewis
Allison Park, Pennsylvania
A+ average, Ranked top 1% of class, National Merit Scholar, National Honor Society, Senior Class Vice President, School Newspaper Editor
Swimming, Dance Team
As a literacy tutor, helped inner-city elementary school children improve their reading skills, reading camp volunteer

Elana Alessandra Meyers
Douglasville, Georgia
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society, Student Council representative, Senior Class Treasurer
Basketball, Softball, Track, Soccer
Youth softball coach volunteer, volleyball volunteer (line judge/score keeper), Key Club volunteer



Annie Roeser
Marsing, Idaho
A average, National Honor Society, Homedale High School's Student Body President
Basketball, Volleyball, High School Rodeo Team
DARE Role Model, nursing home volunteer, 8th-grade volleyball club volunteer coach

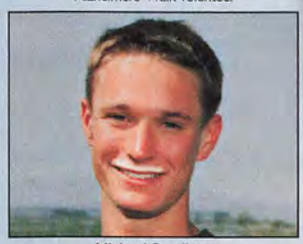


Joshua Paul Romero
Alto, New Mexico
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society, Class Valedictorian, Student Council President, MESA Vice President
Track, Cross Country
Kidz Konnection playground-building volunteer, Coats for Kids organizer, United Blood Services blood-drive volunteer

Brian Allen Sanders
Sedona, Arizona
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society President, Student Council Secretary, School Newspaper Business Manager, Key Club Vice President & Treasurer
Basketball, Baseball, Football
Habitat for Humanity volunteer, Alzheimers' Walk volunteer

Jennifer L. Smith
McKinney, Texas
A average, National Honor Society, Golden State Scholar, Student Council Secretary, Speech/Debate team
Gymnastics, Cheerleading, Dance, Golf
Red Cross Blood Drive volunteer, Peer-Tutor – Spanish-speaking students, Cheer-Dance coach volunteer for disadvantaged youth

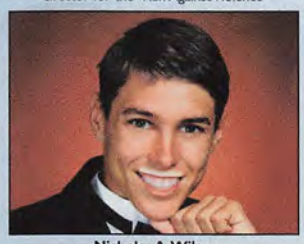
Jane Splittgerber
Omaha, Nebraska
A average, Ranked top 1% of class, National Honor Society, Student Council Vice President, Drama lead character
Basketball, Soccer, Softball, Tennis
Mission volunteer in Dominican Republic – mission team cleaned and painted a church in Santo Domingo, Read Across America volunteer



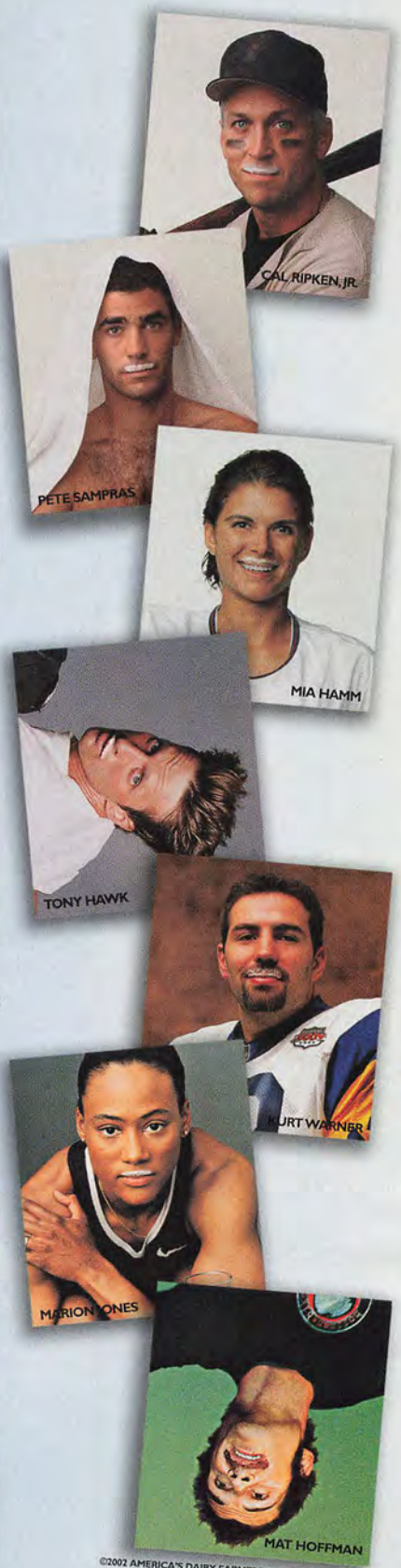
Michael Sundberg
Lancaster, California
A+ average, ranked No. 1 in class, Class Valedictorian, National Honor Society, twice elected President of the California Scholarship Federation
Track, Cross Country
American Cancer Society Youth Board of Directors, organizer, fund-raiser and race director for the "Run Against Violence"

Adam Van Etten
Steilacoom, Washington
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Merit Scholar, National Honor Society, Senior Class President, Math Team member
Track, Cross Country
Hospital Foundation fund-raiser volunteer, High School Blood Drive volunteer, Homeless Shelter Food Server

Lauren Wallace
Reno, Nevada
A+ average, Ranked No. 1 in class, National Honor Society, Class Valedictorian, President of high school's chapter of National Honor Society
Volleyball
American Heart Association volunteer, Habitat for Humanity volunteer, Ronald McDonald House (food kitchen) volunteer



Nicholas A. Wilson
Jacksonville, Florida
A+ average, Ranked top 1% of class, National Merit Scholar, National Honor Society
Track, Swimming, Soccer, Cross Country
Eagle Scout Service Project – rebricked the front sidewalk of St. John's Presbyterian Church, making it safer for elderly members to attend church



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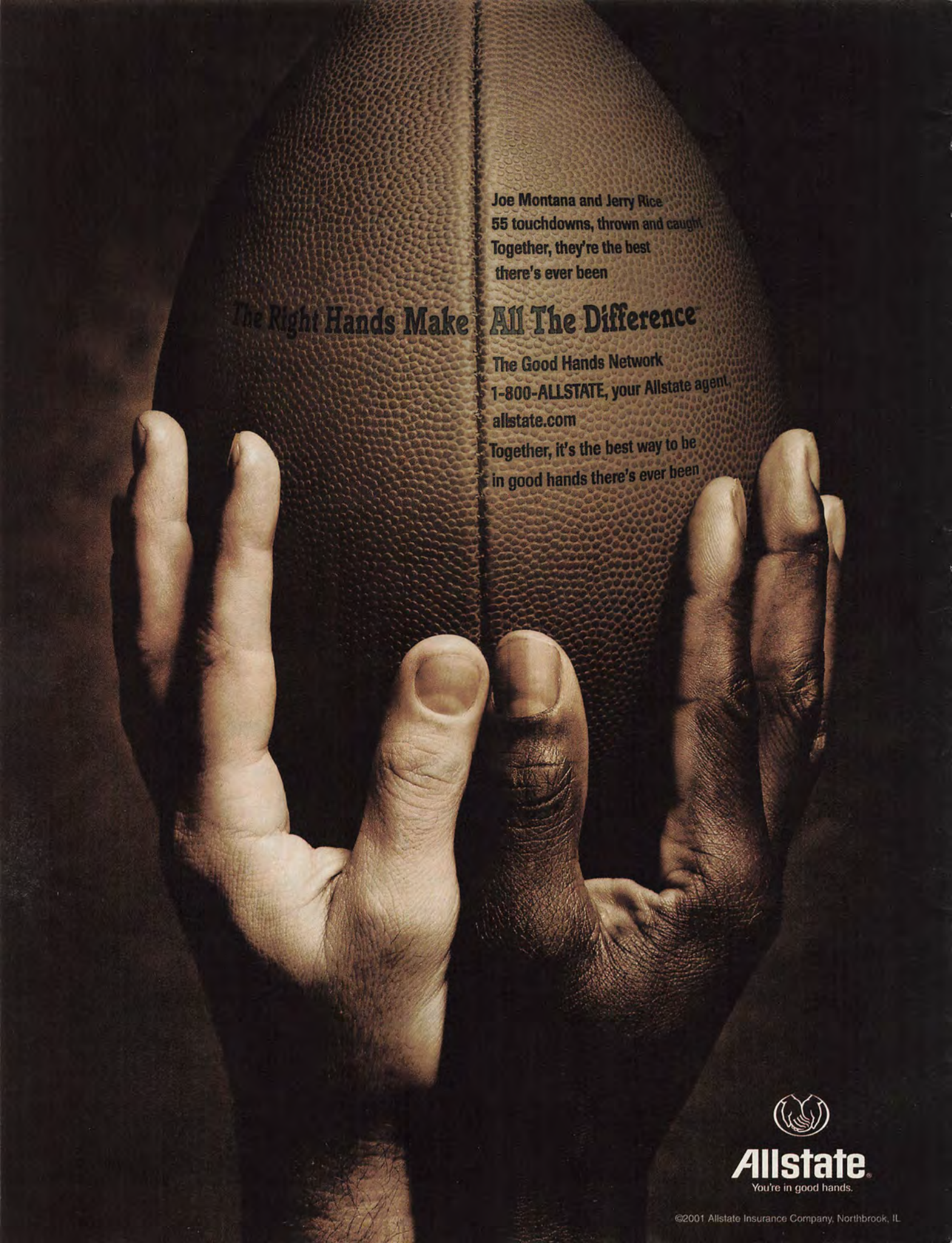
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Together, they're the best
there's ever been
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in good hands there's ever been
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Sports Illustrated
July 1, 2002
VOLUME 97, NO. 1

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PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER GREGOIRE
INSETS BY TOM DIPACE (KILE);
JACQUES DEMARTHON/AFP (SOCCER)

cnnsi.com

For complete coverage of the action at the All England Club, including live scores and **Jon Wertheim**'s daily dispatches from courtside, go to **cnnsi.com/wimbledon.**

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MOTOR SPORTS
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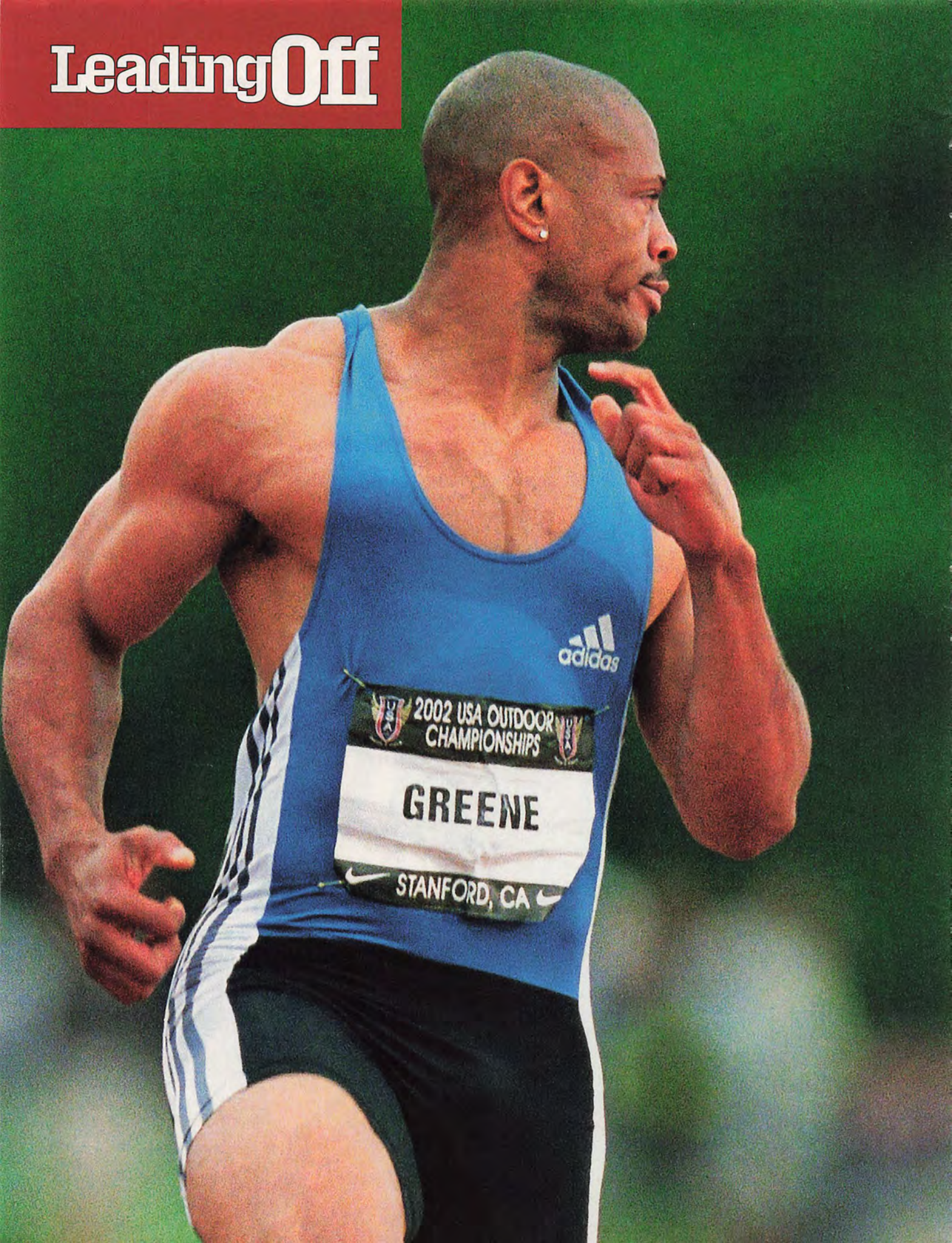
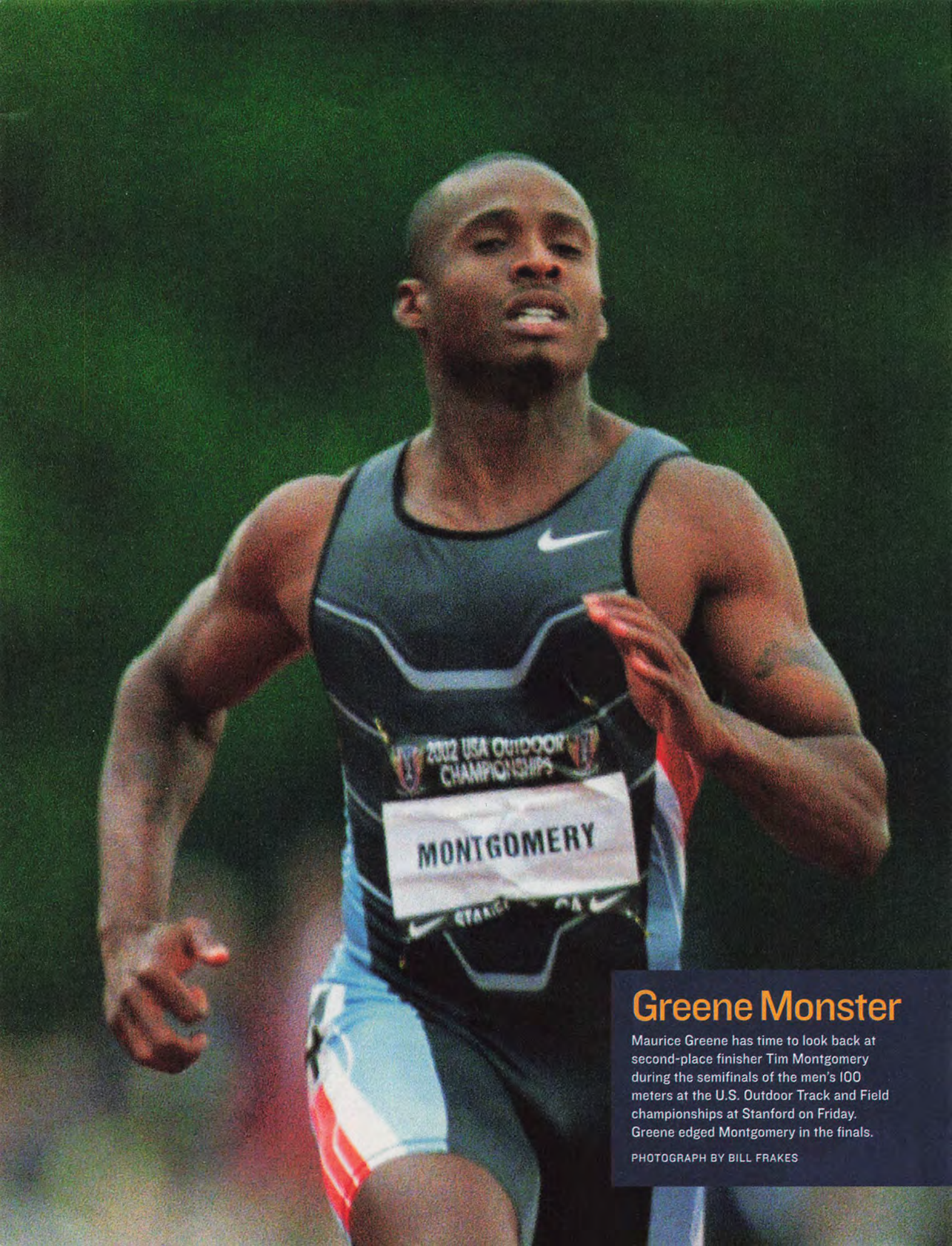
Dale Earnhardt Jr. and other young drivers are making stock car racing bigger than ever
by Jeff MacGregor

THROWBACK Sue Bird of the Seattle Storm, a playmaker who can also score, may lead the WNBA in assists—in more ways than one (page 48).

JEFF REINKING/WNBAE/GETTY IMAGES

LeadingOff

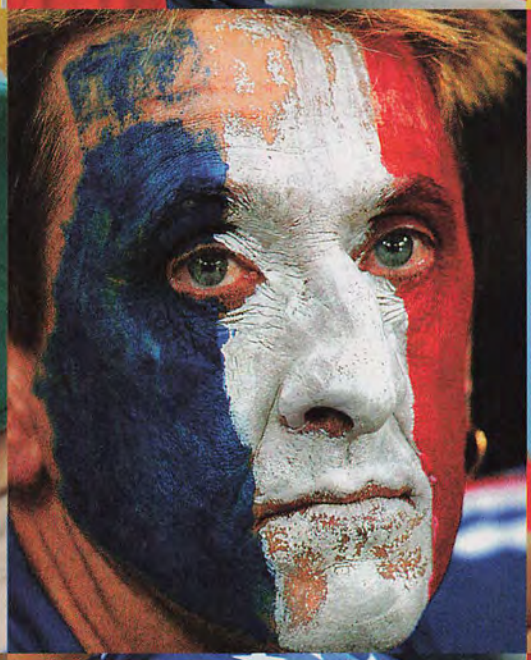




Greene Monster

Maurice Greene has time to look back at second-place finisher Tim Montgomery during the semifinals of the men's 100 meters at the U.S. Outdoor Track and Field championships at Stanford on Friday. Greene edged Montgomery in the finals.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL FRAKES



Leading Off Paint Your Noggin This year's World Cup (page 42) has been a boon for the host countries of South

Korea and Japan, funneling tourist dollars into a wide variety of businesses, including those smart enough to corner the face-painting market.

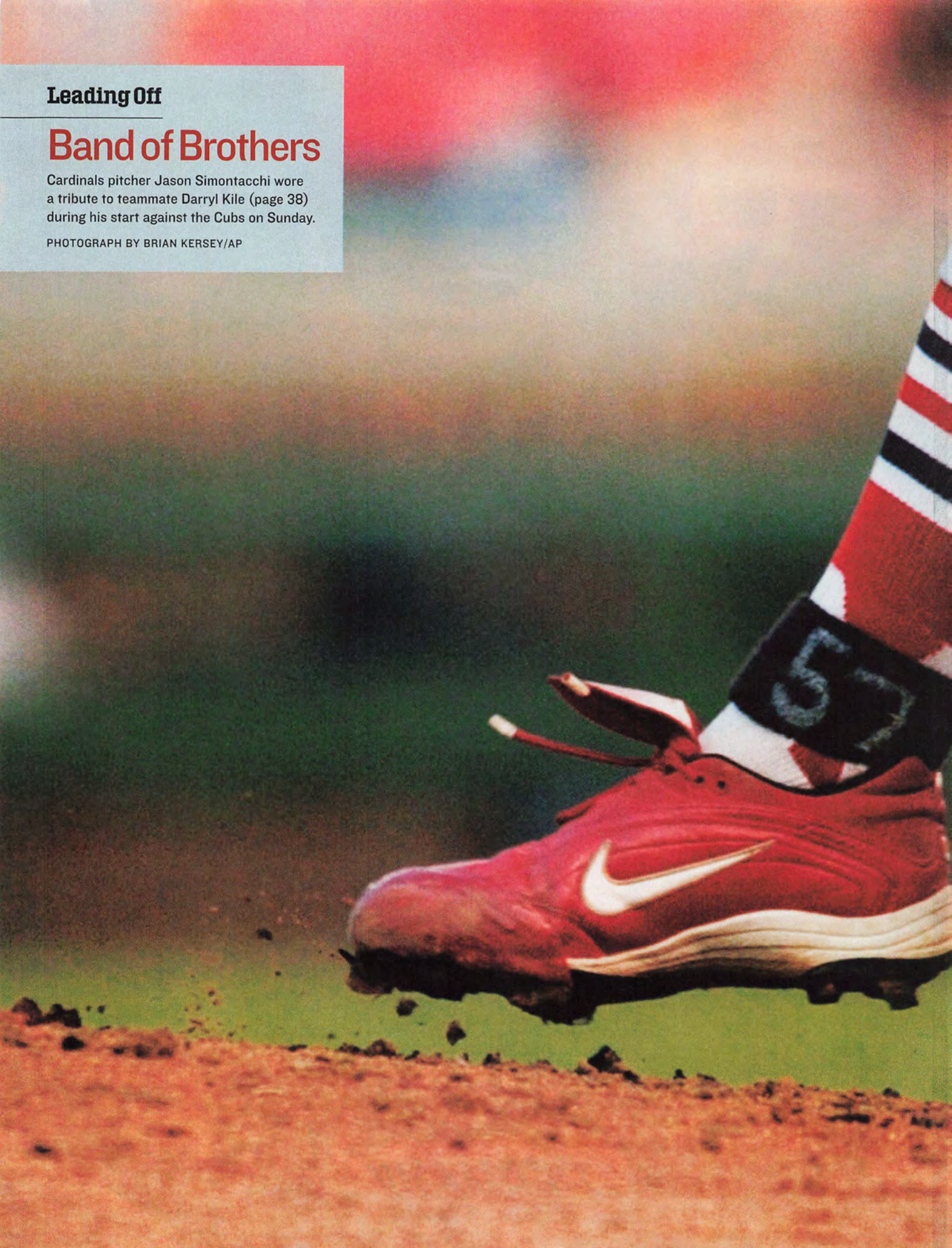
PHOTOGRAPHS BY REUTERS, AFP, AP AND GETTY IMAGES

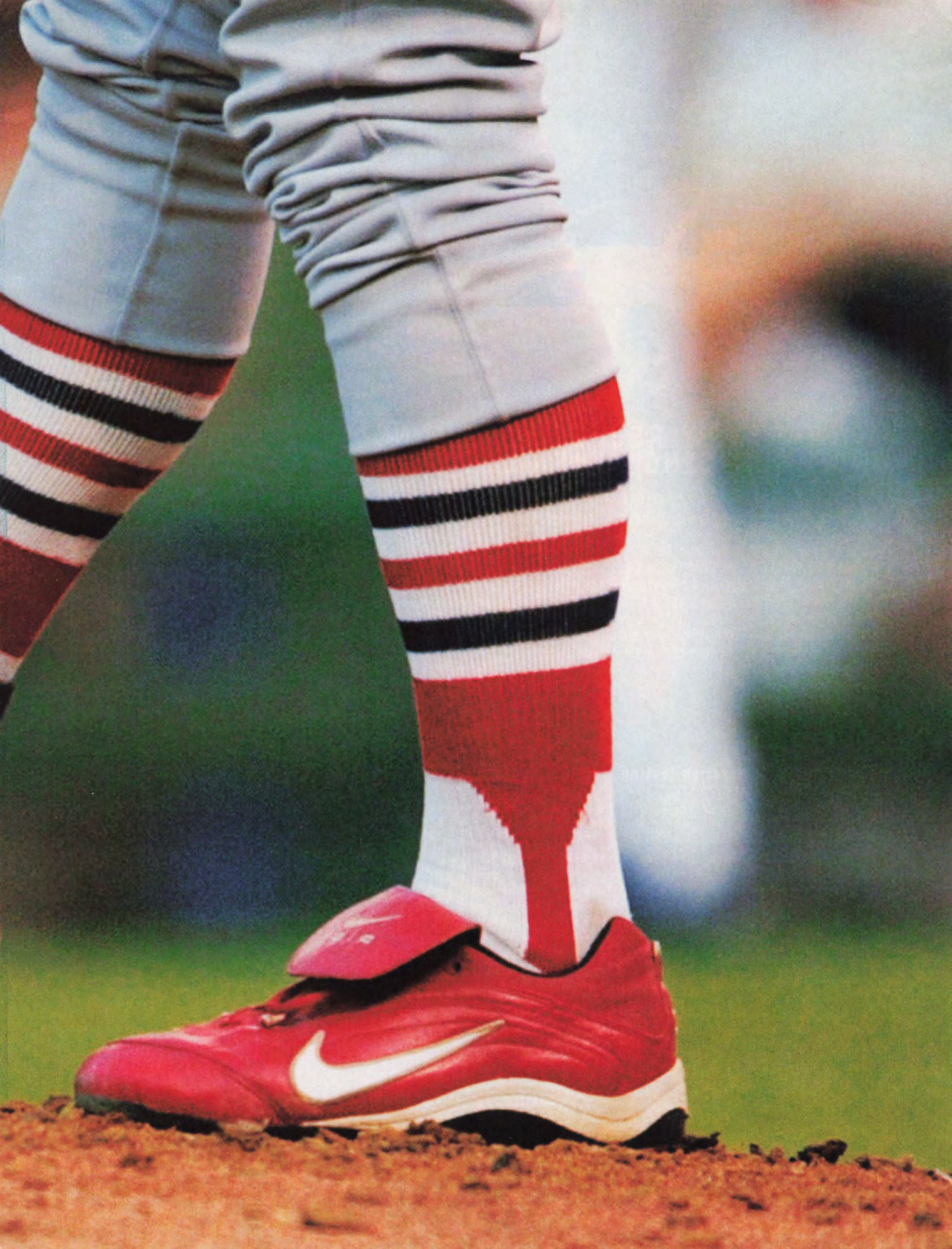
Leading Off

Band of Brothers

Cardinals pitcher Jason Simontacchi wore a tribute to teammate Darryl Kile (page 38) during his start against the Cubs on Sunday.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN KERSEY/AP





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The new Suzuki Aerio Sedan and Aerio SX. Foresight has finally taken shape. With more standard horsepower than the 2002 Honda Civic DX and Ford Focus LX, it's no surprise that the 2002 Aerio S has the best acceleration, outperforming them both. And with an abundance of overall space and standard features like air conditioning, power windows/mirrors, 6-speaker CD stereo and tilt-steering, they shatter every small car preconception. You knew this was coming. You just didn't know from where. For more information visit suzuki.com. Or better yet, test-drive a new Suzuki Aerio today at your local dealer.

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	2002 Suzuki Aerio S AT	2002 Honda Civic DX AT	2002 Ford Focus LX AT
Standard Horsepower	141 hp	115 hp	110 hp
0-60 mph Acceleration	9.60 sec	9.86 sec	10.59 sec
Highway Merging Acceleration (20-65 mph)	9.65 sec	9.97 sec	10.38 sec
Highway Passing Acceleration (40-70 mph)	8.15 sec	8.71 sec	9.34 sec
Air Conditioning	Std	OPT	OPT
Power Windows/Mirrors	Std	N/A	N/A

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Advanced Placement

While it may be tempting to criticize Brandon Hancock's vanity for his beefcake pose, can one really blame him (*Blue-Chip Diary*, June 10)? His build is fantastic, and he's an 18-year-old with a 4.0 high school GPA who graduated early so he could begin his college career. We should instead praise his maturity. While many of his peers concern themselves with cool clothes, fast cars and hanging out at the mall, Hancock is fulfilling his academic and athletic potential.

Ted Quinn, Nyack, N.Y.

Stanley Cup Showdown • Steve Nash Meets Bill Murray
THE 19 GAME WAR
Sports Illustrated
The NBA Finals
Kidd vs. Kobe
He who makes the big plays wins

Please tell me Hancock wrote this article with tongue in cheek. Tell me it was a creative assignment for his Writing 140 class. Tell me he is Sidd Finch's brother. Tell me this is a late April Fool's joke. Or just assure me that no one on the planet can possibly be that conceited.

Mickey Carlton, Longwood, Fla.

By the time I neared the end of Hancock's narcissistic drivel, I fully expected him to ditch his date and invite *himself* to the prom. I gave the article to my eighth-grader as an example of how *not* to carry himself should he achieve athletic success.

Glenn Holcombe, Coos Bay, Ore.

The Hawk Has Landed

Tony Hawk (*Making Millions*, June 10) is not only old and a dinosaur, but he is also a sellout. Skateboarding has always been a sport for the rebellious or socially challenged, but now it has become a sport for little kids whose parents buy them the "cool" skate stuff from corporations that care only about image and cash, not the true spirit of the sport. You may have made millions at 34, Tony, but you ruined the sport in doing so.

Steven Scheible, Spencerport, N.Y.

As a 37-year-old on a skateboard I receive some disbelieving looks from kids in the neighborhood, but they don't realize I'm exactly like them: just trying to "be like Tony."

Frederick C. Fahrbach
Castro Valley, Calif.

Hawk inspires beyond his athletic feats. Here is a man who is a good father and husband, has been an unmitigated success in business and still rips on a skateboard. Tony is more of an inspiration to me than any big-time pro athlete could ever be. He represents the hope that I can be for my son everything my father was for me—without ever having to grow up.

Michael Harvey
Salida, Colo.

You missed the point of skateboarding. Would Ken Caminiti take steroids if it wasn't for the money? Would Mike Tyson fight if there were no payday? Would anyone care how fast a horse was if they didn't have 100 bucks riding on his nose? No. No. No. Would Tony Hawk skateboard if he didn't make millions? Yes. Yes. Yes. Please do all us skater punks a favor. Stick to sports that you know, the ones that are dominated by money and greed. Skateboarding has a purity that you couldn't even begin to imagine. LIVE TO SKATE, SKATE OR DIE!

Paul Puccio, Albany, N.Y.

Best of Enemies

While it may be the fans, not the players, who keep the Yankees–Red Sox rivalry alive (*19 Games*, June 10), isn't that the way it should be? I went to Fenway two years ago for a series against New York, and I'll never forget listening to Sox fans chant, "Yankees suck! Yankees suck!" Thing was, it was an interleague series. The Red Sox were playing the Mets.

Jasen Corns, Tulsa

Freedom to Heckle

Frank Deford's article on heckling (SCORECARD, June 10) was right on. Some fans may cross the line, but most are there to have fun. Heckling is and always will be a part of sports.

Michael Tiso, Clarence, N.Y.

Wouldn't it be interesting if players could go to the fans' workplaces and yell and throw things at them?

Barry Ulrich, Claremont, Calif.

At least you are allowed to heckle in Boston and New Jersey. At the SkyDome for a Blue Jays game, if you get too loud, security tells you to be quiet. And the Jays wonder why they have lost so many fans!

Damian Ford, Mississauga, Ont.

Playing in Pain

I read in amazement Rick Reilly's account of Jocelyn Forest's performance in the women's College World Series after her sister was murdered (THE LIFE OF REILLY, June 10). I don't think it's easy to define courage, however you always know it when you see it. I hope Forest can find some solace in the fact that her story will undoubtedly inspire others to do courageous things.

William Lanzana, Mahopac, N.Y.

A Vote for Scotty

I know it's only June, but I have a nomination for SI's Sportsman of the Year. How about Scotty Bowman? That seems to be a suitable way to recognize the man, the coach, his 46-year career and his records that will *never* be broken.

Steven J. Figiel
Royal Palm Beach, Fla.

To Contact SI

LETTERS

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- Letters should include the writer's full name, address and home telephone number and may be edited for purposes of clarity and space.

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MANNY MILLAN (KIDD) AND JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

Phillip Buchanon wears NFL Equipment Apparel: Hooded Fleece and Play Dry Performance Short.

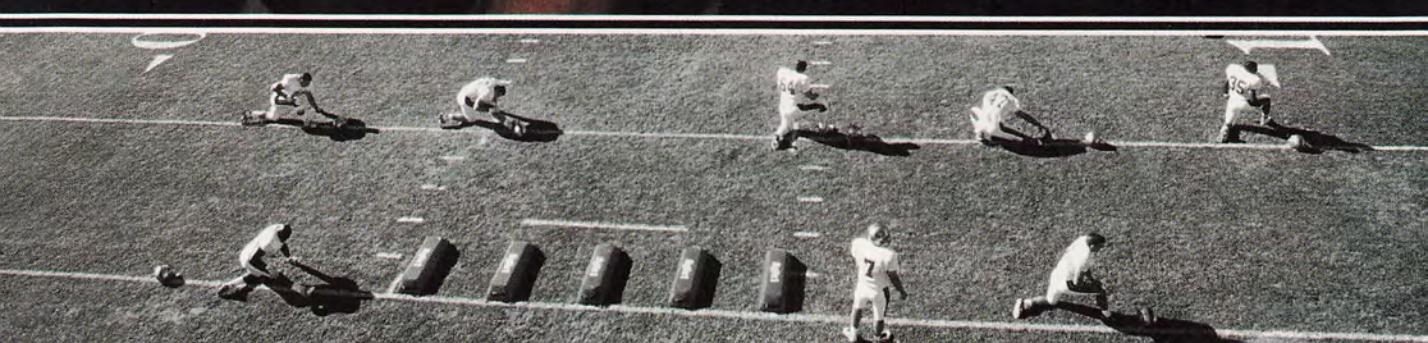
National Champion Phillip Buchanon zooms around Oakland's training camp to the beat of the silver & black

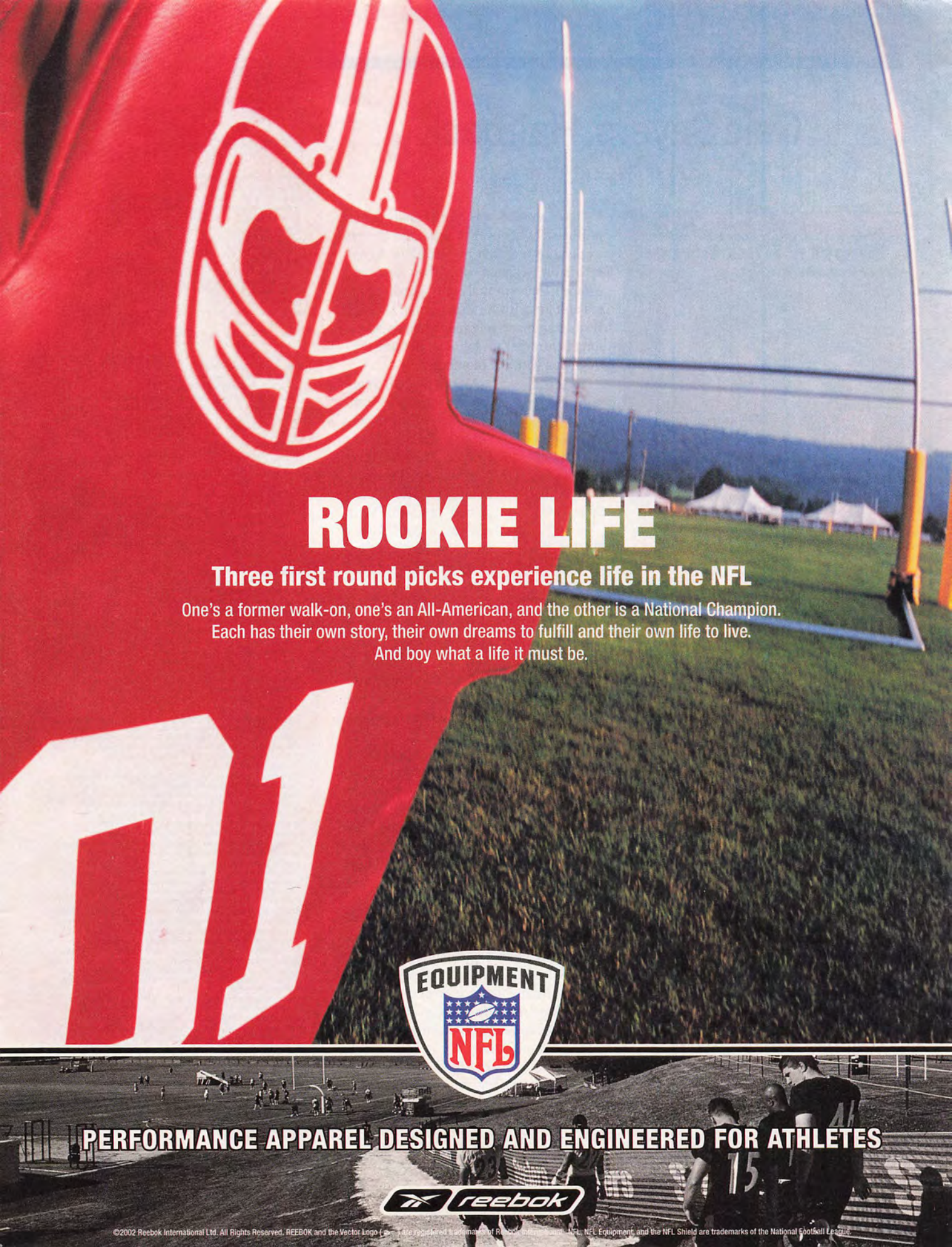
Quentin Jammer wears NFL Equipment Apparel: Play Dry Tight Fit Tee and Fleece Pant.

All-American Quentin Jammer downloads the Charger D at San Diego's training camp

Ashley Lelie wears
NFL Equipment Apparel:
Play Dry Loose Fit Tee
and Performance Short.

Ashley Lelie, college walk-on now Denver's first pick, pulls into the Broncos' training camp




ROOKIE LIFE
Three first round picks experience life in the NFL
One's a former walk-on, one's an All-American, and the other is a National Champion.
Each has their own story, their own dreams to fulfill and their own life to live.
And boy what a life it must be.
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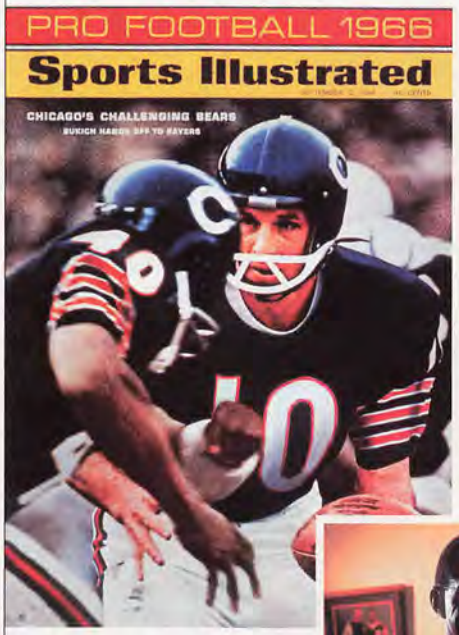
Gale Sayers, Halfback

SEPTEMBER 12, 1966



NEIL LEIFER (COVER); TODD ROSENBERG

Early in his NFL career Sayers became interested in business, and now he runs his own technology solutions company.

GALE SAYERS was more Houdini than halfback. Whenever it appeared he was trapped by a cluster of defenders, Sayers invariably wriggled out of their reach and escaped, leaving a trail of disbelieving players and fans. It's no wonder that Chicago Bears teammates referred to him as Magic, long before Earvin Johnson became synonymous with the moniker.

SHORT STORY
Sayers (taking a handoff from Rudy Bukich) made the Hall of Fame in only 68 games.

More than 30 years later, as founder and chairman of the Sayers Group, LLC, a Mount Prospect, Ill.–based company that provides technology solutions and posted $250 million in revenues in 2001, Sayers, 59, wishes he could magically stimulate the flat tech economy—he had to lay off 75 of his 300 employees last year. "Tech's been hurt," says Sayers, who was an Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year in 1999, "but we're starting to see some light."

On the advice of fellow running back Jon Arnett, Sayers got interested in business and began working for PaineWebber in Chicago during his second season with the Bears, in 1966. "We didn't practice on Mondays, so I'd go to the office," says Sayers. "On Fridays we'd have light practice, so I'd go to work afterward. [Coach George] Halas didn't care. He knew I'd be ready to play on Sunday." Following the 1967 season Sayers studied for and passed the stockbroker's exam, launching a five-year dual career as a broker–running back.

As a rookie Sayers gained 2,272 total yards (rushing, receiving, kickoff and punt returns), and he led the league in rushing during his second year. But in the ninth week of the 1968 season, while carrying the ball on a sweep, he tore ligaments in his right knee. After surgery Sayers came back in '69 to again lead the NFL in rushing. The following year was devastating: His backup and friend, Brian Piccolo, died of cancer, and Sayers suffered serious ligament damage in his left knee. His second comeback failed, and he retired on the eve of the '72 season. Sayers's brilliant career lasted only 68 games.

Interested in athletic administration, Sayers returned to his alma mater, Kansas, and completed work on his bachelor's degree in physical education, and then earned a master's in educational administration. In 1976 he became the athletic director at Southern Illinois; after five years he decided to seek an NFL front-office job, but no team had an opening. He moved back to the Chicago area, where he started his technology solutions company in 1984. "Adversity has helped me grow," says Sayers. "If I had played longer in the NFL, things may have turned out differently."

—John O'Keefe

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Physically Fit for Office

by Steve Rushin

I WAS NOT, I confess, entirely prepared when the President of the United States shook my hand, looked me in the eye and asked—unbidden—as I was leaving the White House, "You think Bonds is on steroids?"

This was last Thursday, in the Roosevelt Room, adjacent to the Oval Office. Yet it might have been any office or den in America, except that behind us, on the mantelpiece—where you or I might have a bobblehead Jeter—was the 1906 Nobel Peace Prize.

Even so, President George W. Bush proved disarmingly down-to-earth while discussing, for 45 minutes, sports and fitness in America. Said Dubya, on the dearth of dubyas for the last-place Texas Rangers (the team he once owned), "Right now, they've got the highest cost per win in the history of baseball." He laughed and looked, however briefly, unburdened, Middle East yielding to AL West.

I called him "Mr. President," and he called me "Mr. Sports Illustrated," and when I asked Bush which athletes he admired, he mentioned Big Texas, which is what the President sometimes calls Nolan Ryan, who pitched, at age 46, for the Rangers during the Bush era. "His last day pitching," said Bush, with evident pride while clutching his right biceps, "was when his muscle *snapped* and rolled up like a rubber band."

As he spoke of Big Texas, Bush looked like Bigger Texas, wearing a belt buckle (bearing the presidential seal) slightly smaller than a beer coaster.

It is a lean frame that supports the weight of the world. Bush evidently doesn't indulge in the candy bars available for world leaders in the West Wing lobby waiting room, where Jiang Zemin might help himself to a handful of Snickers. The President pumps iron—the most powerful man in the world can bench 215—while lamenting that his workout routine has become, inescapably, *too* routine. "I'm captured in a bubble," the President said. Running has become his mistress, but she is a tease, for the onetime marathoner cannot, as Chief Executive, enter a Fun Run on the spur of the moment. "It's one of the saddest things about the presidency," said Bush. "There can be nothing better than taking off and heading out and running the Mall." But he'll never know. It's just beyond the back fence and forever out of reach.

And so he endures the loneliness of the middle-distance runner, turning endless laps, four days a week, three to four miles a day, at a 6:45 to 7:30 pace, almost exclusively on a quarter-mile circuit on the South Lawn. "Listen, the south ground is fantastic," he said, "but you've run it once, you've run it a hundred times."

Seated across from the President was another runner, England's Sebastian Coe, former world-record holder in the mile, two-time Olympic medalist and, in the past decade, member of Parliament. When Coe innocently asked Bush what he thought of steroids, the President had news for the Briton. "We've got kind of a debate here in America, and you're trying to draw me right into the crosshairs of the Sports Illustrated writer," he said. "Listen, people shouldn't abuse drugs. And there's an interesting debate in America as to whether or not baseball players should be tested. I've always felt like they should be."

Bush played Little League baseball in Texas. "I was clean, by the way," he told the Sports Illustrated writer. And for the record, he gave Barry Bonds the benefit of the doubt. "As we get older," said the President, patting his modest waistline, "many of us tend to get heavier."

In front of Bush was a blank legal pad, and on the pad was a round, candy-cane-striped mint in clear cellophane. It had been waiting for him when he entered the room.

"The first organized athletics our little girls played was soccer," he said at one point, glancing at the mint. "Or swarmball, I guess you could call it." Bush smiled sheepishly and for a moment was lost in the memory. "They were like little bees, you know? It was one of my proudest moments when one of our daughters scored a goal. God, I remember hugging Laura." The President held out his arms in a bear hug. "It was like a dramatic event for us," he said. "One of the few athletic feats."

> Bush laughed and looked briefly unburdened, Middle East yielding to AL West.

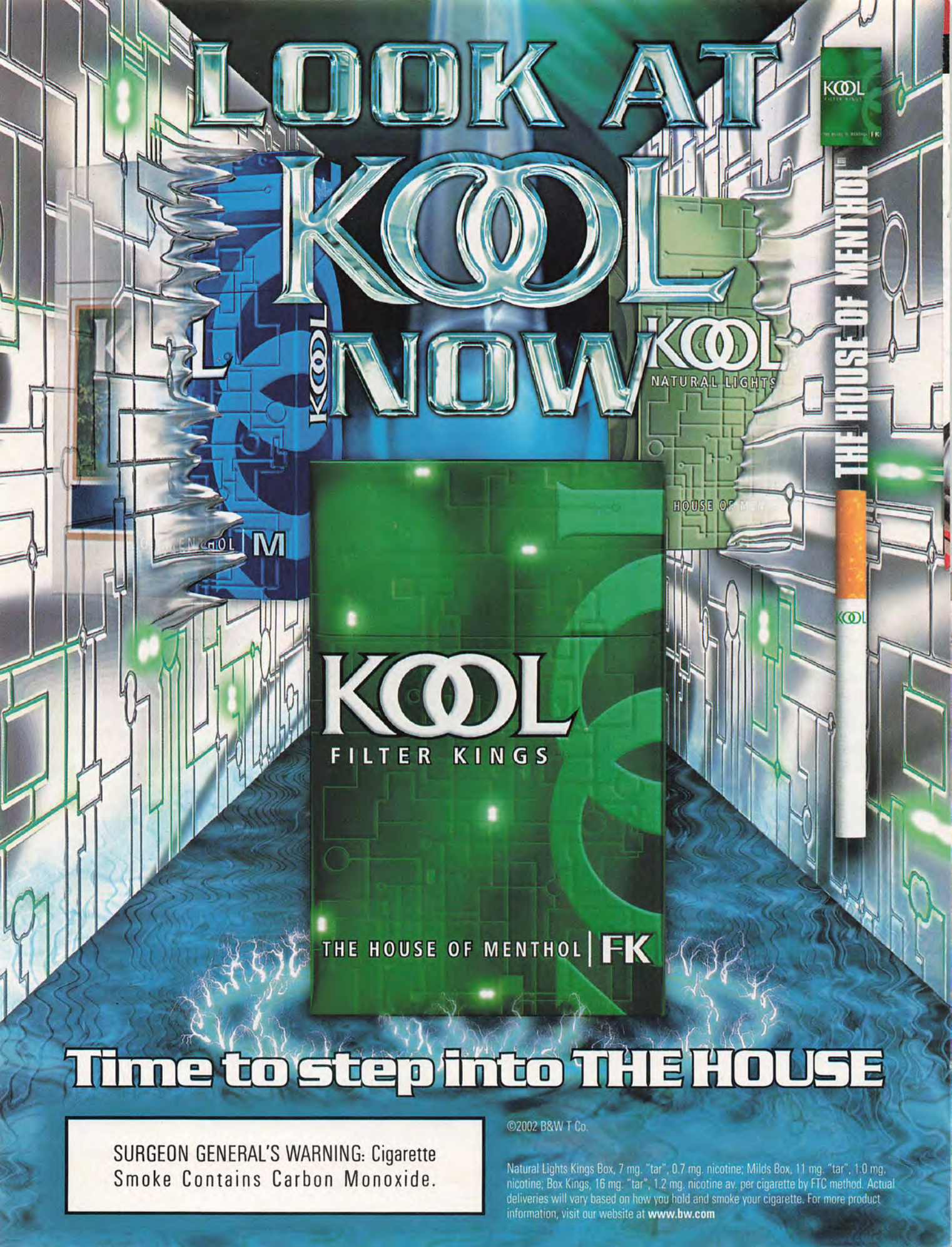
Suddenly the President recalled his daughter Barbara, barely in grade school, being fouled in a basketball game. "And I'll never forget the look on her face. 'That's a long way away,' " the President squeaked, and pantomimed the little girl looking from foul line to basket. Bush crinkled his eyes, which appeared to go glossy, and said, "This little-bitty girl. . . ."

Earlier, Bush had wistfully alluded to a time, prepresidency, "when I was free." And for a moment he was free again, just another father—inexpressibly human—who counted, among his proudest moments, a daughter's first goal.

A few minutes later, senior White House counsel Karen Hughes mouthed to a press aide, "Wrap it up." In an instant the President was returned to reality, the carriage transformed to a pumpkin. In the West Bank on Thursday, Palestinian gunmen killed five Israeli settlers.

The President rose from his chair. He left the mint on the table. □

PETER GREGOIRE



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"If he goes to China after all this, he'll never be allowed to come back." —ROUNDBALL DIPLOMACY, PAGE 26

Scorecard

Edited by Albert Kim and Kostya Kennedy

Wimble-done?

Modern rackets and a scarcity of grass events weaken the tournament's cachet

SHAME ON GUSTAVO Kuerten, Alex Corretja and French Open champ Albert Costa for deeming Wimbledon too unimportant to bother with this year. All tennis players worth their courtesy cars ought to compete in the four Grand Slams. But will those stars be sitting out the most significant event on the tennis calendar? No, not unless they're going to bail on the U.S. Open as well.

What makes Wimbledon unique is also what makes it increasingly irrelevant: the grass underfoot. Wimbledon's anachronistic surface transforms a fluid, nuanced game into a mindless shootout with staccato points. The slick greensward punishes steady baseline players and bestows an unfair advantage on those like Goran Ivanisevic—ranked outside the top 100 when he won last year—who come armed with a serve, a prayer and an ultramodern racket.

Tennis has clay-court and hard-court specialists, indoor and outdoor players, but by now no pro has been weaned on grass. Wimbledon is one of the few grass events left. A generation ago several significant tournaments, including two Grand Slams, were held on turf. That seven-time champ Pete Sampras—who hasn't won a tournament in two years and enters Wimbledon in the throes of a disastrous slump—has been mentioned as a favorite speaks volumes about just how fluky and specialized "the Championships" have become. In short, using Wimbledon as the sport's ne plus ultra is like holding a dunk contest to determine the NBA champion.

No question Wimbledon is dripping with charm, and the venue will always be "tennis's cathedral," as Sampras calls it. But times change. If tradition and history were so sacrosanct, the players taking the court this week would be brandishing wooden rackets. And the Williams sisters might not be allowed through the gates. —*L. Jon Wertheim*

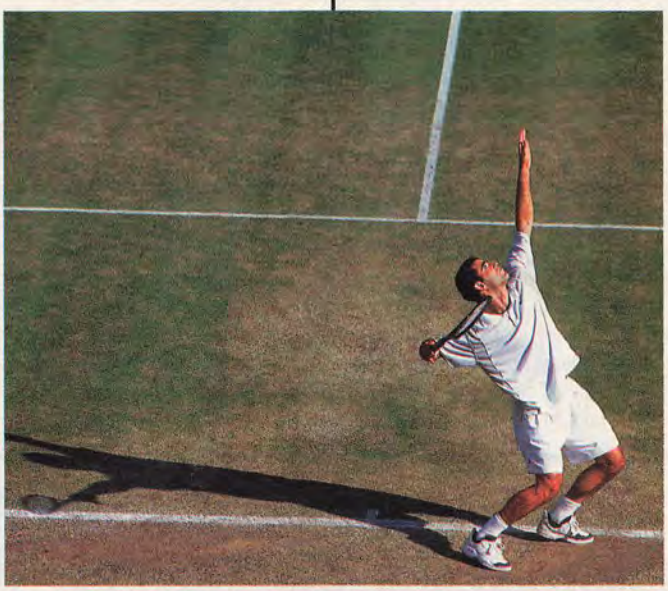
It's time to celebrate a surface that makes everyone equal and defines the elite

THOSE WEAK-MINDED players who complain about the quick points and unforgiving surface of Wimbledon (as well as those cowards who skip the tournament entirely) get no sympathy in this space. Favoring the courageous serve-and-volleyer, that most noble of tennis warriors, over an endless brigade of boring baseline bashers, Wimbledon's lush and venerable lawns are the aficionado's best friend. True, players rarely if ever compete on grass during the rest of the season, but really: Should Wimbledon be faulted for forcing the latest crop of millionaire athletes out of their comfort zones? How perfect that a 125-year-old tournament has become all about coping with the shock of the new. Grass, as 1992 winner Andre Agassi says, "is the great equalizer."

And yet history shows it is also the surface that defines the elite. The champions of Wimbledon tend to be the champions of all tennis and of all time: Wills, Tilden, Borg, Navratilova, McEnroe and Sampras just to name a few. Nor should we forget that the sport's most memorable match—the epic 1980 final between Bjorn Borg and John McEnroe—was played on Centre Court.

The oldest of the four majors remains the sport's main bridge from the past to the present. It is a perfect mix of Old World values (the Royal Box, the strawberry stalls and commoners camping out nightly during the fortnight to snap up the few remaining match-day tickets) and new millennium sport (short rallies and eye-poppingly fast serves). Those with no respect for history, who can't appreciate the absence of stadium lights or rejoice in a rule that players must wear predominantly white clothing, need not worry. The U.S. Open, with its overpriced hamburgers, witching-hour tennis and Wall Street royalty, is just two months away.

—*Richard Deitsch*



BOB MARTIN

KICKING GRASS Some say Wimbledon's surface, which aids big servers like Sampras, makes the 125-year-old event increasingly irrelevant.

Breaking Away

The next great American runner bolts Michigan to turn professional

In the spring of 2001, 18-year-old Virginia high school senior Alan Webb ran the mile in 3:53.43 at the Prefontaine Classic in Eugene, Ore., obliterating a scholastic record that had been set more than three decades earlier by Jim Ryun. Webb was given a standing ovation at Hayward Field and took a victory lap in the embrace of Moroccan world-record holder Hicham El Guerrouj. At that moment Webb also assumed responsibility for guiding the sport's domestic future. It was heady stuff.

AHEAD OF THE PACK An astounding high school mile gave Webb unusual options.

By then Webb had already announced that he would attend and run for Michigan, even though the college system, with its demanding three-season structure (cross-country, indoor track, outdoor track) and emphasis on team scoring, has been increasingly criticized as an ineffective way to produce world champions and Olympic medalists. (Neither Maurice Greene nor Marion Jones, the U.S.'s top track stars, ran regularly in college.) Other nations tend to nurture their runners more carefully through more focused developmental programs.

The issue surfaced as soon as Webb broke Ryun's record. As Webb lay stretching on the Hayward training track after the Prefontaine mile, U.S. Olympic sprinter Jon Drummond walked past. "There's Alan Webb, the savior of track and field," Drummond said to an acquaintance. "Too bad the college system will eat him up and spit him out."

In a way it already has: Last week Webb announced that he was leaving Michigan and would reunite with his high school coach, Scott Raczko, to run as a professional (while taking classes at George Mason University). Webb had what most freshmen would consider an outstanding season, winning the Big Ten cross-country and 1,500-meter titles, but he finished 11th in the NCAA cross-country meet, fourth in the NCAA 1,500 and missed the entire winter with an Achilles tendon injury. He did not approach his times from high school. "I wasn't happy with my performance," he says. "I think to be the best at something, you have to do extraordinary things. Obviously, this is kind of extraordinary, but the truth is, I considered doing it last year."

College track fans needn't despair, though—this is hardly the start of an exodus. Webb is the rare teen runner for whom college is not the only option. His agent, former world-class miler Ray Flynn, will likely be able to capitalize on the lingering buzz from Webb's remarkable high school career to negotiate endorsement contracts. "Whether the college system is right for other people, I don't know," says Webb. "I just need to go forward and push myself to get better." —*Tim Layden*

GO FIGURE

$125 Amount the Hawks have pledged to pay every season-ticket holder if the team fails to reach the NBA playoffs next season.

15.91 Percentage drop this year in the Dow Jones Stoxx Football Index, which tracks the 35 publicly traded soccer teams in Europe.

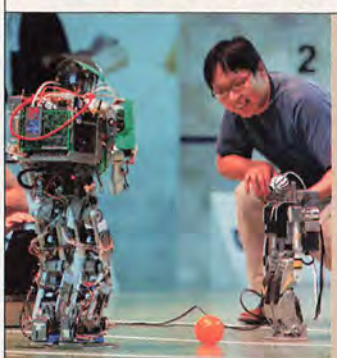
42 Of the 49 World Cup players involved in ad campaigns for either Nike or Adidas who had failed to score a goal entering the tournament's semifinals.

48 Inmates who escaped from an Indonesian prison on June 17 because their guards were distracted by the Belgium-Brazil World Cup match on television.

3 Deaths in high school and college pole vaulting this year, prompting the NCAA to increase the minimum size of competition landing pads to 19′ 8″ by 16′ 5″ from its current 16 by 12 feet.

9th Finish for Johannesburg, out of 12 horses in a race at Royal Ascot in Berkshire, England; after winning seven of seven starts last year, Kentucky Derby disappointment Johannesburg is 0–3 as a 3-year-old.

TOY STORY SOCCER-PLAYING ROBOTS

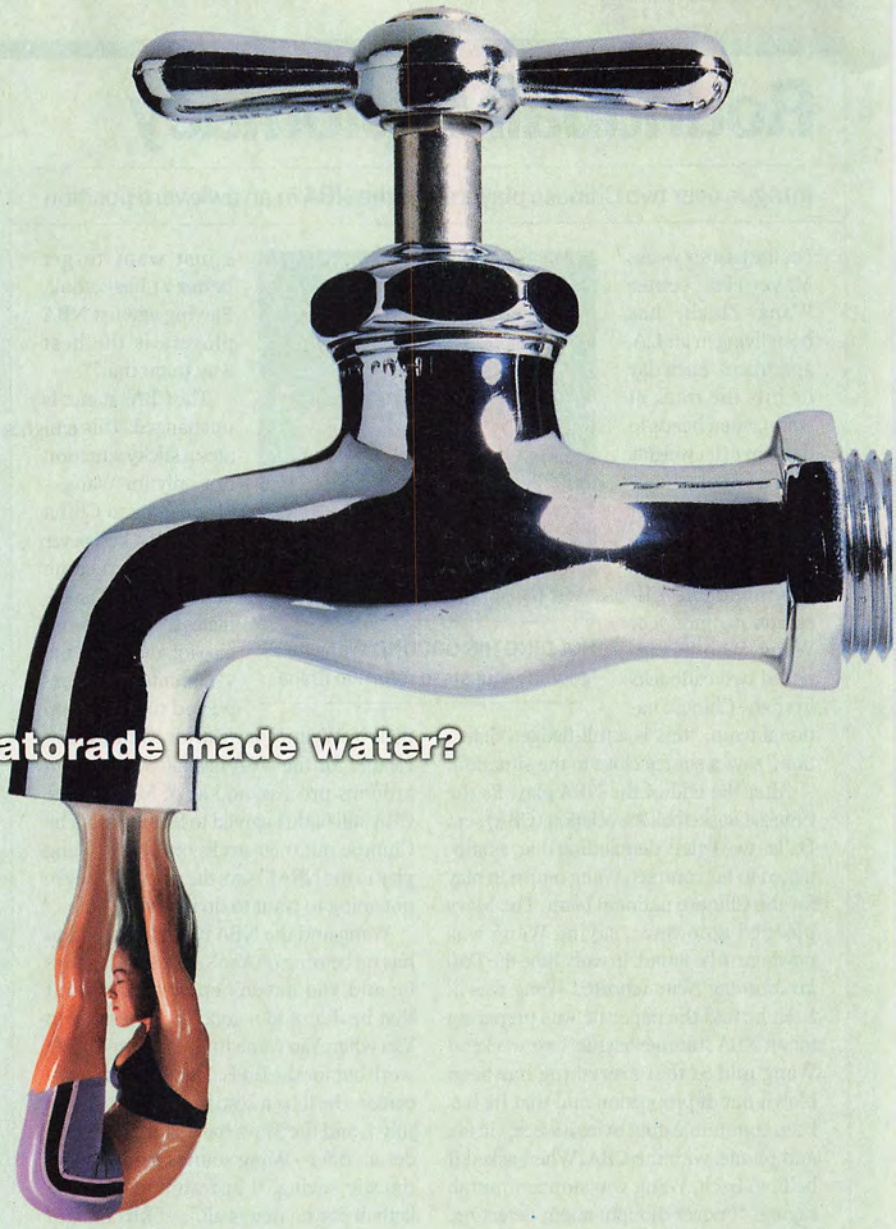


METAL WINNERS The goal is to create a team of robots that can beat the best human squad.

It takes blood and guts to win a World Cup. . . . Or does it? Last week, at venues in Japan and South Korea, 193 teams from 30 nations participated in RoboCup 2002, a soccer tournament for robots. The competitors ranged from dog robots to five-foot-tall humanoids. Most of the machines can shoot and dribble to some degree; some whiz around at six mph. Many are programmed to run sophisticated set plays. On Saturday the Cornell Big Red, two-time world champs of the technically advanced small-sized league (six inches and smaller), beat the University of Melbourne Roobots 10–0 to reach the semifinals. (The tournament ends on Wednesday.)

RoboCup has grown steadily since its 1997 debut. Although competition gets intense, rival teams often share knowledge before the event. The hope of all is to advance robotics to the point where a robots could compete against humans. "The dream is to field a team that could win the World Cup in 2050," says Raffaello D'Andrea, the Big Red's faculty adviser. "But that's a very lofty goal."

BILL FRAKES (WEBB); SHIZUO KAMBAYASHI/AP (MAN WITH ROBOTS); HIROJI KUBOTA/MAGNUM (DOGS); KYODO NEWS/AP (WHITE ROBOTS)



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Roundball Diplomacy

Intrigue over two Chinese players has the NBA in an awkward position

For the past six weeks Mavericks center Wang Zhizhi has been living in an L.A. apartment. Each day he hits the track at 8 a.m., then heads to the gym to lift weights and work on shooting and defense. For any other NBA player this would be a commendable offseason regimen. For Wang, who has ignored two callbacks from the Chinese national team, "this is a full-fledged defection," says a source close to the situation.

HOLDING HIS GROUND Wang has ignored requests to return to China.

After the end of the NBA playoffs the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) sent Dallas two letters demanding that, as stipulated in his contract, Wang return to play for the Chinese national team. The Mavs pleaded ignorance, saying Wang was nowhere to be found. In early June the *Dallas Morning News* reported Wang was in L.A.; he told the paper he was preparing for an NBA summer league. Last weekend Wang told SI that everything has been blown out of proportion and that he has been communicating twice a week, via fax and phone, with the CBA. When asked if he'll go back, Wang was noncommittal, saying, "I never thought about defecting. I just want to get better at basketball. Playing against NBA players is the best way to do that."

The CBA's stance is unchanged. This creates a sticky situation not only for Wang—"If he goes to China after all this, he'll never be allowed to come back to the U.S.," speculates the source—but also for Yao Ming, the 7' 5" center who's expected to be the top pick in Wednesday's draft. Getting Yao cleared for the NBA has already been an arduous process, and as of Monday the CBA still hadn't agreed to let him go. "The Chinese put their necks out [to let Wang play in the NBA]," says the source. "They're not going to want to do it again."

Wang and the NBA insist his situation has no bearing on Yao's status. Wang says he and Yao haven't spoken lately, but that he did send a good-luck message to Yao when Yao came to Chicago in May to work out for the Bulls. Regarding his own career—he'll be a restricted free agent on July 1, and the Mavs have said they'll tender an offer—Wang sounds similarly optimistic, saying, "I just want to be a basketball player, that is all." —*Chris Ballard*

INNER GAME METS OUTFIELDER TONY TARASCO

SON SHINES Tarasco stays close to dad (right, with Tony in 2000).

Late on April 11 Tony Tarasco went to an empty Shea Stadium and sprinkled his father's ashes near the outfield fence. Jack Tarasco had wanted his ashes scattered on the Pasadena field where his son first played ball, and Tony had done that shortly after his father died of pneumonia at 74 in April 2001. But Tarasco, 31, who was then in Triple A ball, saved some ashes for his return to the bigs. The Mets called him up in April, and last week he had his best stretch in years, hitting two homers and scoring a game-winning run. On Sunday he made a superb catch near a spot where he'd left some ashes. "My father's spirit has been with me since he passed," Tony says. Adds his stepmother, Juliet, "Jack would be thrilled."

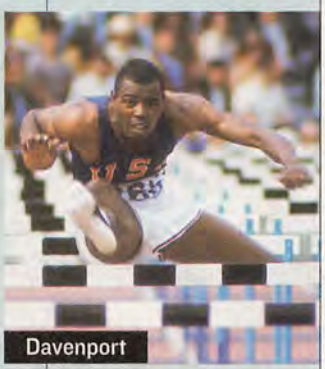
THE BLOTTER

Ordered By NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, in response to the March 18 death of fan Brittanie Cecil, new protective measures at all arenas. Before next season teams must install netting above the fiberglass walls that border the corners and end zones of rinks and also ensure that the glass along the sides of the rinks is at least five feet above the top of the boards. Cecil, 13, was hit by a puck while attending a Blue Jackets game.

Signed By the Red Sox, John Henry Williams, 33, the son of Ted Williams, to a minor league contract. John Henry, a 6' 5", 220-pound self-dubbed "power-hitting first baseman" who has never played pro ball and is Ted's business manager, will go to Class A Sarasota. A Sox spokesman says the signing is "unusual," but that Ted's stature made the team "willing to go beyond the norm."

Convicted Of misdemeanor assault, former Jazz center Olden Polynice, 38, for spitting at and punching 21-year-old Tyler Swensen on a Utah golf course in July 2001. The incident occurred after a shot by one of Swensen's partners struck Polynice in the right arm. Polynice faces up to six months in jail and a $1,000 fine at his July 15 sentencing.

Died Of a heart attack, Willie Davenport, 59, a four-time Olympian and 1968 gold medalist in the 110-meter hurdles. In '80 Davenport made the U.S. bobsled team for the Lake Placid Olympics, making him the second man to compete in the Summer and Winter Games. Davenport, who spent two years in the 509th Airborne Regiment in the '60s, ran the National Guard Bureau's Office of Sports Management from '99 until his death.



Davenport

Invited By the Heat to their NBA training camp next week, Chiefs All-Pro tight end Tony Gonzalez, who averaged 6.4 points and 4.3 rebounds as a power forward at Cal between 1995 and '97. The 6' 4" Gonzalez has no plans to give up football and says he's going to the camp for conditioning. Said Chiefs coach Dick Vermeil, "Some guys like to play golf. He likes to play basketball."

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (WANG); MARK LEVINE (TARASCO AT SHEA); COURTESY OF THE TARASCO FAMILY (TARASCO WITH DAD); JAMES DRAKE (DAVENPORT)

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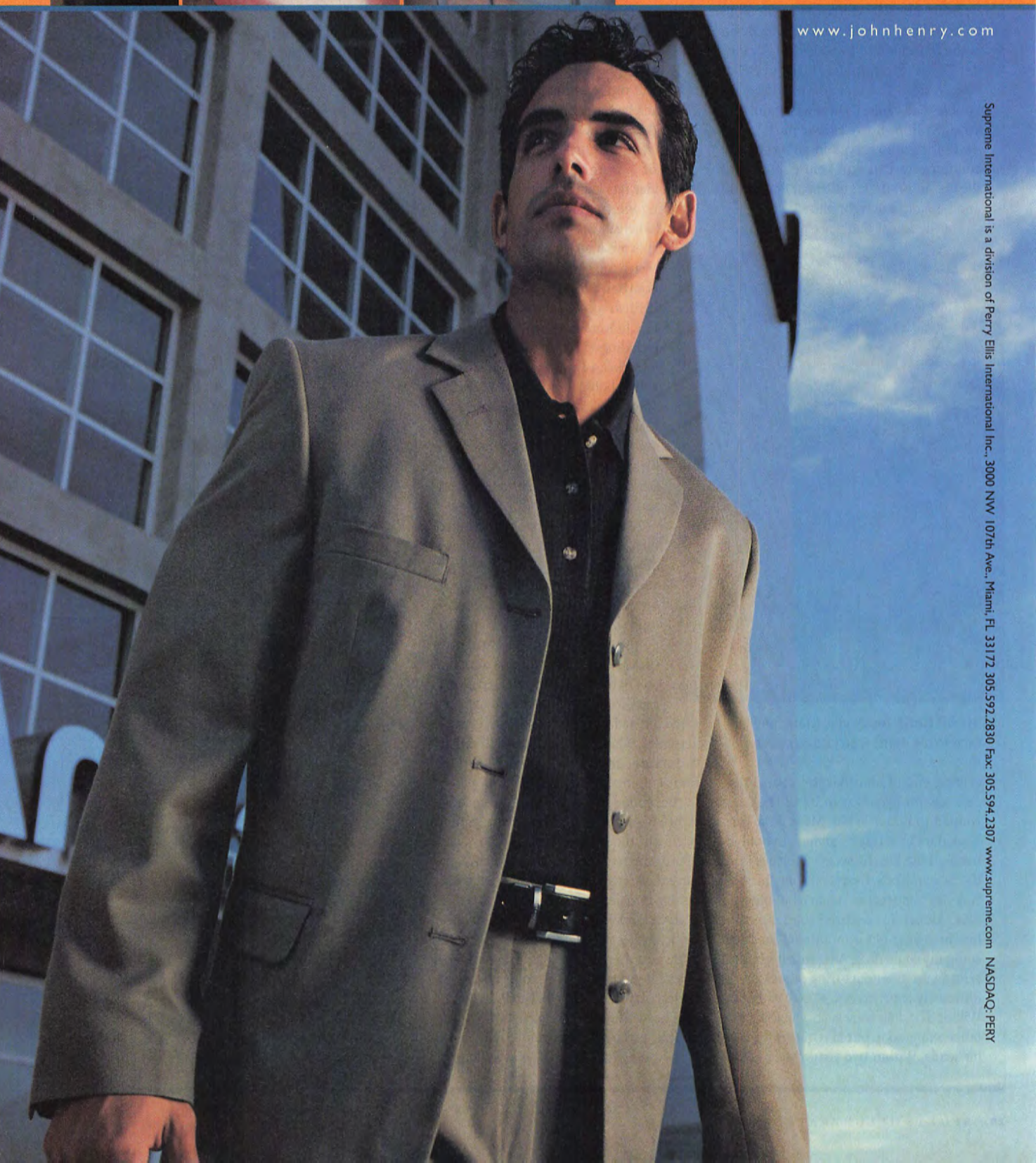

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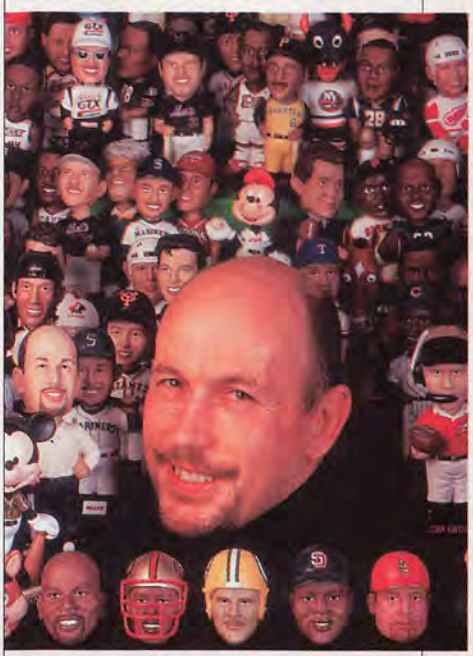
On the Bobble

Meet the man who's made a mint off sports' hottest collectible

No one sets out to become a novelty czar—Malcolm Alexander is still surprised when he hears himself referred to as the Bobblehead King. The 43-year-old Australian is the founder and president of Alexander Global Promotions (AGP) in Bellevue, Wash., the leading producer of bobblehead dolls. "There's certainly no straight line in my career path," says Alexander, who served in an Australian counterterrorism unit before moving to the U.S. in 1990. "It's all about having fun and being in the right place."

For Alexander that place was on the receiving end of an order for a San Francisco Giants giveaway in 1999. The team wanted to honor Willie Mays on a Turn Back the Clock Day by giving out bobbleheads, those kitschy sports figurines from the '50s and '60s. Despite having, he says, "no idea whatsoever" what a bobblehead was, Alexander assured the team that his three-year-old promotional products company could do it. After much trial and error in the manufacturing process, AGP ultimately churned out 35,000 wobbling Willies. The dolls were such a hit that eight other teams soon put in requests for bobbleheads. Within two years fans in Seattle were camping out overnight to get an Ichiro bobblehead, and a craze of Cabbage Patch proportions had begun. In 2002 AGP will produce more than 12 million dolls at its factory north of Hong Kong.



'HEAD CASE Alexander (note familiar face to his right) won't do bin Laden.

Every major league team, every NFL team and most teams in the NBA and NHL has had a bobblehead promotion. While the collectibles market has suffered lately from the glut—there are 14 variations of a Derek Jeter bobblehead—Alexander has kept his business thriving by going international. He sells dolls in Japan (where likenesses of the Yomiuri Giants are a hit), in Australia (there's been a run on miniature Aussie Rules Football players) and in Europe (British soccer stars are big). In the U.S. he's come up with innovations including a "bobble-armed" Tommy John doll, a Dikembe Mutombo doll with a bobble finger and a bobble-scene of Giants' broadcasters Mike Krukow and Duane Kuiper seated at a desk, which will be the first bobblehead creation to have a conversation with itself. (There's a 15-second sound chip inside.)

Although AGP has made more than 2,500 different models, Alexander has his limits. The three-year veteran of Australia's Special Air Service, who led a U.N. peacekeeping team in Iran in 1988, blanched at the recent request from the Class A Hagerstown Suns to make an Osama bin Laden doll. ("It didn't seem right," he says.) He's also refused orders for representations of certain actresses, whom Alexander would rather not name, created with their proportions enhanced—and bobbling away.

Alexander says the key to the success of bobbleheads is not the spring-action parts but the ratio of head to body size. "For some reason it appeals to people to have these realistic heads and then these cute, whimsical bodies," he says. To that end Alexander believes the future of bobbleheads lies in even more realistic faces. "The next thing we're doing is laser mapping," he says, referring to a process in which players' faces will be digitally reproduced. The result, Alexander says, will bobble, er, boggle your mind.

—Chris Ballard

Q+A BOW WOW

The 15-year-old rapper stars in *Like Mike* as an orphan who finds a pair of magical sneakers that give him super hoops skills. Bow, who learned the game on the playground courts in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio, got the role because he could play.

"I shoot like Kobe."

SI: *You recently changed your name from Lil' Bow Wow to just Bow Wow. Why?*
Bow Wow: I'm getting older. By the time I'm 20, I don't want to be known as no Lil' Bow Wow.

SI: *How would you describe your hoops game?*
Bow Wow: I've got a handle like Iverson, and I shoot like Kobe.

SI: *A lot of NBA stars appear in* Like Mike. *Did you school any of them on the set?*
Bow Wow: Of course. Tracy McGrady gave me trouble—he smacked my shot to the bleachers—but everyone else I beat at one-on-one.

SI: *You mean guys like Jason Kidd, Chris Webber and Alonzo Mourning? Who was the easiest to beat?*
Bow Wow: Mourning. He's got game, but he just couldn't keep up with me.

SI: *You do a cover of Kurtis Blow's* Basketball *on the film's soundtrack. The original had a line, "Ralph Sampson is really mean." Do you know who Sampson is?*
Bow Wow: No.

SI: *You've said if you don't make the NBA, you'll become a sports agent. Which has a better chance of happening?*
Bow Wow: NBA player. But I've got the smarts to become an agent.

SI: *Who wins a one-on-one between you and your rap rival, [12-year-old] Lil' Romeo?*
Bow Wow: I haven't seen his game. But I'm so eager to play Lil' Romeo, it's not even funny.

SI: *How about between you and Master P [Lil' Romeo's father]?*
Bow Wow: I would destroy Master P.

SI: *But wasn't he in the Continental Basketball Association?*
Bow Wow: He wasn't there for long.

SI: *If someone calls you a dog, do you take that as an insult or a compliment?*
Bow Wow: If I'm playing ball, I'd take it as an insult. But if someone walked up and said, "Yo, what up, dog," I don't take that as a negative. *—Pete McEntegart*

DANIEL SHEEHAN (BOBBLEHEADS); SIDNEY BALDWIN/TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX (BOW WOW)

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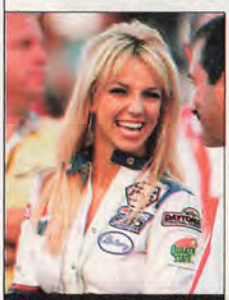
SPORTS BEAT

PICTURE THIS It's something every athlete knows all too well: that sinking feeling when hope of victory slips away. For these oarsmen that moment came during a race in the South China Sea during the International Dragon Boat Festival in Hong Kong. The annual race honors the martyrdom of Chu Yuan, a rebel statesman and poet who hurled himself into a river and died 2,000 years ago.

NEWS THAT pop star **Britney Spears** will be making a movie set in the world of Winston Cup racing came as a surprise to many in Hollywood last week, but NASCAR insiders say the project has been in the works for almost a year. The singer first met with NASCAR officials in July 2001, when she served as the grand marshal at the Pepsi 400. "It was her first Winston Cup event," says Paul Brooks, NASCAR's VP of broadcasting. "She was blown away by the spectacle of it—the sounds, the crowds, the drivers." At the meeting Spears, her manager Larry Rudolph and producer Ann Carli, who produced the singer's first feature, *Crossroads*, pitched NASCAR brass on a story about the daughter of a successful stock car team owner and how the young woman (played by Spears) inspires a former driver to return to the sport. Though intrigued, NASCAR officials wanted to make sure the film would be faithful to the Winston Cup experience. "We're very protective of our sport," says Brooks. "We wanted assurances that if we got involved, we'd be represented appropriately." In short, says Brooks, they wanted to make sure they didn't get another *Days of Thunder*, the much-reviled (at least in racing circles) 1990 **Tom Cruise** film, which featured, among other cinematic inventions, scenes of **Robert Duvall** as a good-ol'-boy team owner who assembles stock cars in a barn. For the Spears project, film crews will set up at several Winston Cup events, including Daytona, and a number of NASCAR drivers will appear in the movie.



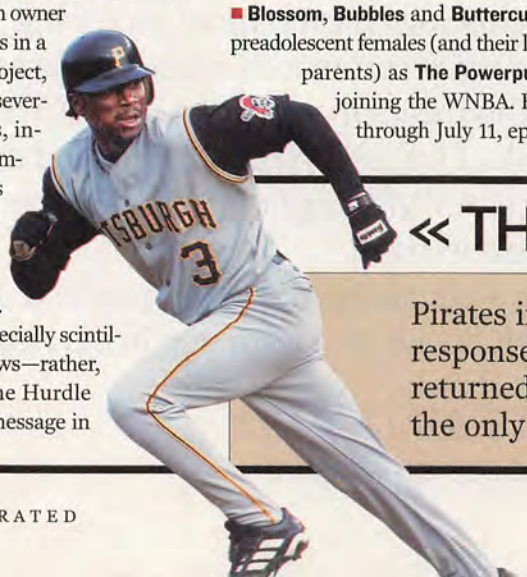
Spears at Pepsi 400

■ Rockies manager **Clint Hurdle** is a quote master. That's not to say he's especially scintillating in media interviews—rather, every day before a game Hurdle posts an inspirational message in the Rockies' locker room. It's a practice he began as a manager in the Mets' minor league system in the early '90s and one he continued after being named the Rockies' hitting coach in '97. "I would just find something to throw up on [the sheet listing groups for batting practice] just to see who was paying attention," says Hurdle, who digs up the quotes from reference books he keeps in his office. For Opening Day the message was "Every journey begins with a first step." After being named the Rockies' manager on April 26, he went to the words of **Marcus Aurelius**: "Let every action aim solely at the common good." The message last Friday, after the team had completed a 2–4 week: "Only the mediocre are always at their best." Says Rockies first baseman **Todd Helton**, "It lets us know how he's feeling about things. And a lot of times they provide a lot of insight as to where the game ranks in life."

■ **Blossom, Bubbles** and **Buttercup**—known to preadolescent females (and their long-suffering parents) as **The Powerpuff Girls**—are joining the WNBA. From June 21 through July 11, episodes of the Cartoon Network series will be shown before games, posters will be given out to fans, and the Girls themselves—well, costumed actors at least—will make appearances. The idea is to lure Powerpuff fans into the seats in the hopes that once there they'll get hooked on the high-flying stunts of real-life Girl Power heroes such as **Chamique Holdsclaw, Lisa Leslie** and **Sue Bird**. Of course, it might help to throw an evil monkey into the backcourt.

THIS WEEK'S SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

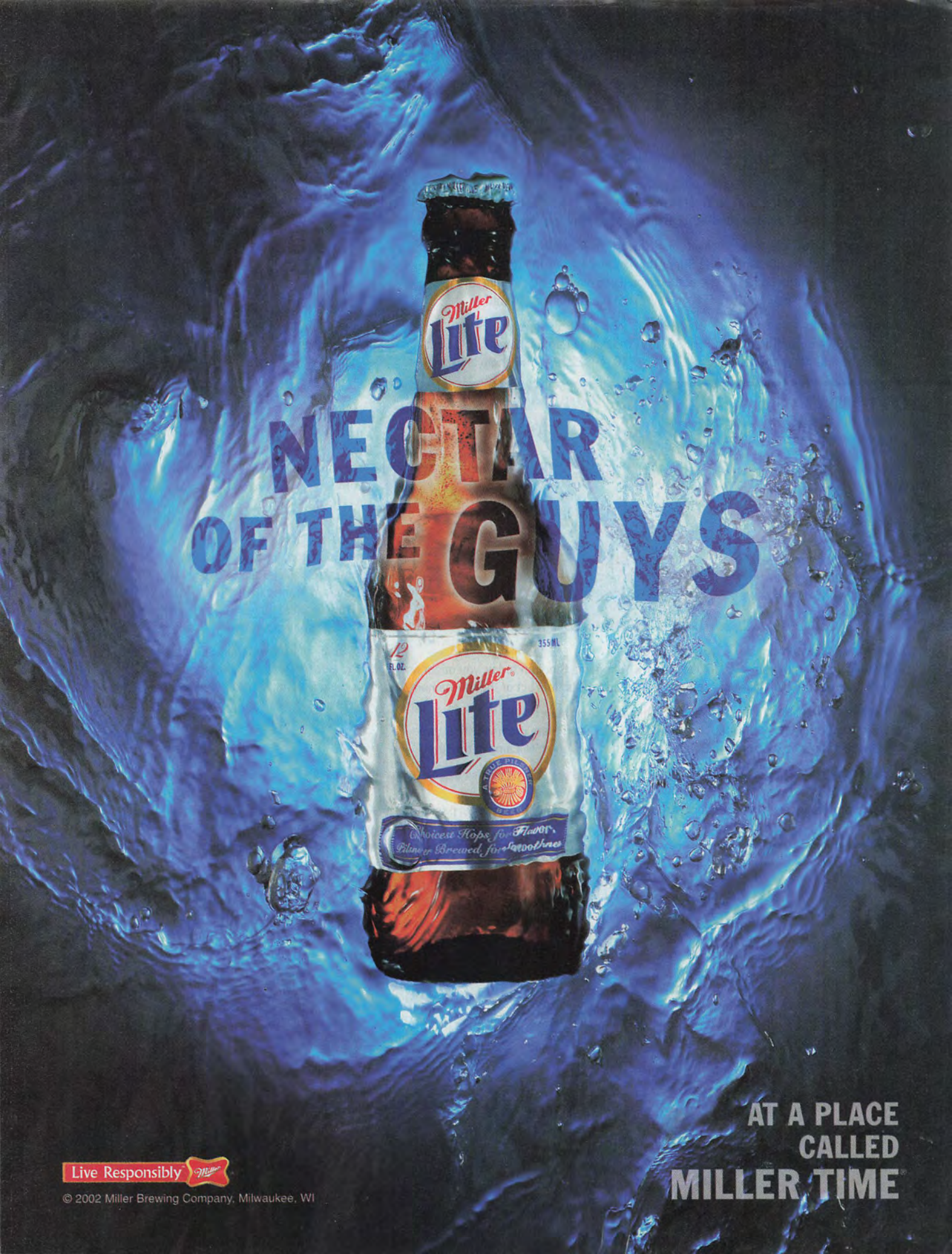
A Painesville, Ohio, judge ordered a man, who ran from police after being stopped for drinking in a car, to compete in a five-mile race; the faster his time in the event, the shorter his sentence will be.



« THEY SAID IT POKEY REESE

Pirates infielder and former Red, on the response he got from the fans when he returned to Cincinnati for a game: "I think the only words they know are, 'You suck.' "

BOB ROSATO (SPEARS); KIN CHEUNG/REUTERS (SINKING BOAT); JOHN BIEVER (REESE)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THE WEEK IN TELEVISION

JUNE 28–JULY 4

FRIDAY 6/28 > TBS 7 PM > **Braves at Red Sox**
Once the home of the Braves, Boston is still friendly to NL East–leading Atlanta—the team is 17–10 against the BoSox in interleague play, including 9–3 at Fenway.

SATURDAY 6/29 > A&E 8 PM > **Behind Closed Doors with Joan Lunden: Westminster Dog Show**
A look behind the curtains of the Super Bowl of dog shows. In addition to backstage footage of the pooches getting groomed, you'll see play-by-play commentator Joe Garagiola explain why it's O.K. to say, "That bitch had a big night."

SATURDAY 6/29 > HBO 9:45 PM > **Wladimir Klitschko vs. Ray Mercer**
Is the 26-year-old Klitschko (38–1, 35 KOs) the heir to Lennox Lewis? This bout with the still-dangerous 41-year-old Mercer (30-4-1, 22 KOs) may help answer that.

>> DON'T MISS
TUESDAY 7/2 > AMC 10 PM

Bruce Lee: A Warrior's Journey
This 90-minute documentary includes many fantasic fight scenes and a previously unreleased battle (filmed in 1972) between Lee and a 7′ 2″ karate killer played by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who warns, "Little fellow, you must have given up the hope of living."

Lee kicks Kareem

SUNDAY 6/30 > ABC 6:30 AM > **World Cup Final**
If you can't be among the 70,000 at Japan's Yokohama Stadium today, you might as well join the 1.7 billion viewers expected to tune in for the final act of the tournament.

THURSDAY 7/4 > TNT 8 AM > **Wimbledon, Women's Semifinals**
Last year Justine Henin ended Jennifer Capriati's Grand Slam dreams with a three-set win in the semis before the Belgian got waffled by Venus Williams in the final.

THURSDAY 7/4 > ESPN2 1–10 PM > **Indians at Yankees (1 PM); Astros at Pirates (4 PM); Cubs at Braves (7 PM)**
Celebrate America's birth with back-to-back-to-back doses of the national pastime.

►Less than 12 hours after eulogizing his father, Jack Buck, Fox Sports announcer Joe Buck arrived in Chicago to broadcast last Saturday's Cardinals-Cubs game. Less than six hours after that he broke the news of Darryl Kile's death *(page 38)* to the nation. After the game was canceled, Buck conducted a heart-wrenching interview with St. Louis manager Tony La Russa, who had been at Jack's funeral the day before. Joe's composure and professionalism were remarkable. Jack would have been proud.

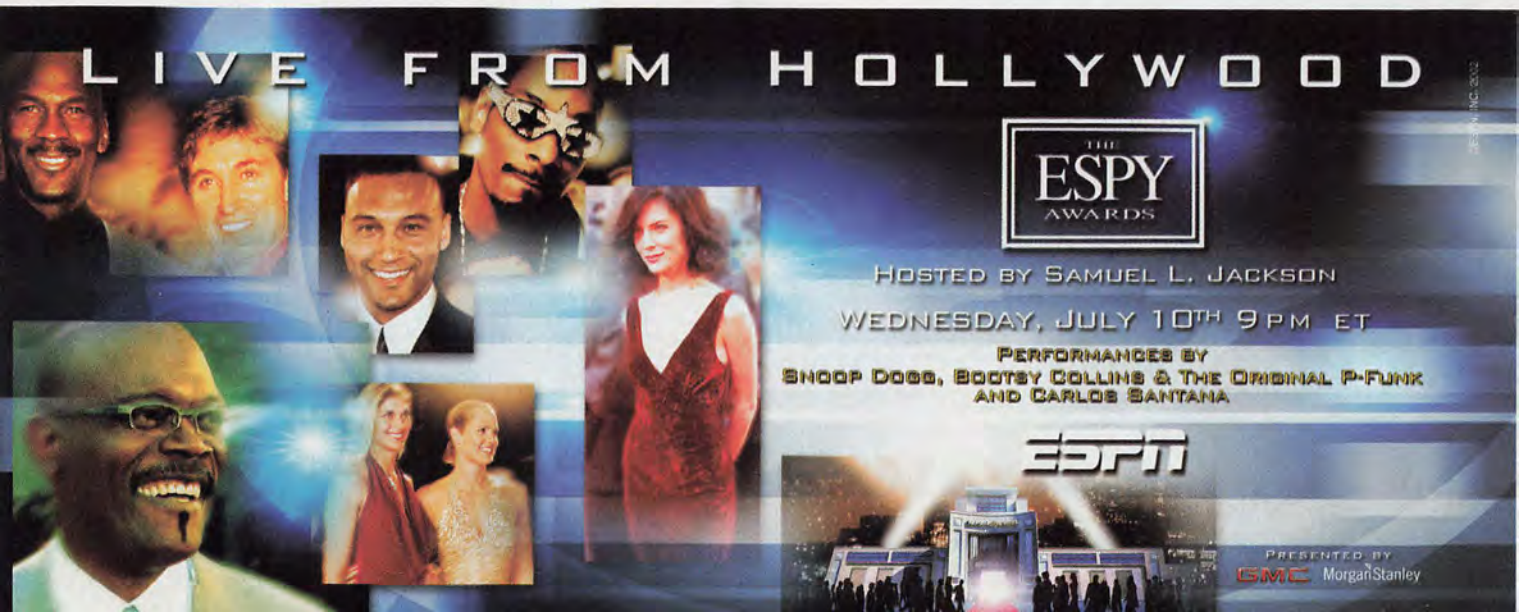
►The documentary *Anna Kournikova: SportsCentury* debuts on June 28 on ESPN Classic, though the network was rebuffed in numerous attempts to interview the starlet. (Anna's rep, David Schwab, says the filming, which took place over several months, conflicted with her playing schedule.) Even without Kournikova—who lost in the first round of Wimbledon on Monday—this well-reported piece brings to life the making of a marketing phenomenon. Viewers, however, will itch for a Kournikova response to criticism such as this from *Tennis Week* publisher Gene Scott: "It's over for her in tennis as far as being a serious tennis player. She's a tennis model now."

UNDER REVIEW

►A Powerful Buck
►Anna's Absence
►A Trio of Women

►As part of its Women in Sports Weekend, ESPN's *The Sports Reporters* replaced its usual crew (Mike Lupica, Bill Conlin, etc.) with a panel of three women—*The Boston Globe*'s Jackie McMullen, ESPN's Michelle Tafoya and *ESPN the Magazine*'s Roxanne Jones—who sat alongside host John Saunders. The engaging conversation (which wasn't limited to women's sports) brought to the fore some fresh voices, and the show's producers should keep the trio in the mix. —*Richard Deitsch*

AMERICAN MOVIE CLASSICS



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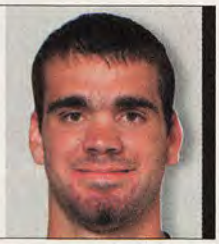
Faces in the Crowd

Jana Peterkova, KARLOVY VARY, CZECH REPUBLIC
Golf
Peterkova, a sophomore, won the individual title and led Florida Southern College to a team victory at the NCAA Division II championships. This was Peterkova's second straight Division II title and the Lady Mocs' third consecutive national championship.

Jack Butcher, LOOGOOTEE, IND.
Basketball
Butcher retired as the winningest high school coach in Indiana history, with 806 victories in 45 years at Loogootee High. He took the team to two state finals, in 1970 and 1975, and suffered only two losing seasons.

Jackie Homiak, BEAR, DEL.
Softball
Jackie, a senior righthander at Caravel Academy, became the first athlete in Delaware history to be selected first-team all-state for five consecutive years. With a record of 19–3 and an 0.24 ERA this year, she led her team to its fourth consecutive state title.

Lashinda Demus, PALMDALE, CALIF.
Track and Field
Demus, a South Carolina freshman, set a world junior record of 54.85 seconds in the 400-meter hurdles at the NCAA outdoor championships. She also ran the anchor leg for a 4×400-meter relay team that set a collegiate record (3:26.46) at the meet.



Josh McKinney, PRINCETON, W.VA.
Soccer
McKinney, 23, led the U.S. team to an international paralympic tournament win in Kerkrade, the Netherlands. He scored seven goals in four games, including all the U.S. goals in a 3–2 win over England in the final, to earn the tournament's Golden Boot award.

Brian Baker, COLUMBUS, GA.
Baseball
Baker, a freshman righthanded pitcher at Columbus State, was named Most Outstanding Player of the NCAA Division II tournament after going 3–0 with one save and 14 strikeouts in 12⅔ innings. For the season Baker went 7–0 with eight saves.

Eugene L. Scott, NEW YORK CITY
Tennis
Scott defeated No. 1–ranked King Van Nostrand 6–4, 3–6, 6–1 to win the USTA men's 65-and-over clay court championship in New Orleans. Scott, eligible because he turns 65 in December, dropped only one set while advancing through the 72-player field.

TRIVIAL MATTERS

Tiger Time

In the Beginning Tiger Woods made his pro debut at the Greater Milwaukee Open on Aug. 29, 1996. That day he shot a 67, but at the end of the first round he trailed leader Nolan Henke by five strokes. Woods finished the tournament at seven under par, tied for 60th. Who won the event?

a. Mark Calcavecchia **c. Jesper Parnevik**
b. Jay Haas **d. Loren Roberts**

Tiger Tamer Woods is deadly when he has a lead. But in his rookie season he was leading the Quad City Classic by a stroke after the third round when he shot a 72 on Sunday to finish tied for fifth. That is the only PGA Tour event that Woods lost after entering the final round alone atop the leader board. Who came from behind to win that tournament?

This Week's Matchup Woods took home $1.08 million for winning the 2001 Players Championship, his largest PGA payday. Pair these other golfers with their largest single-event paychecks.

1. Jack Nicklaus **a. $414,000**
2. Arnold Palmer **b. $50,000**
3. Notah Begay III **c. $144,000**
4. Tom Watson **d. $540,000**

Call to Order Place these golfers in order of the career-best round for each player in a PGA Tour event.

a. David Duval **c. Mark O'Meara**
b. Davis Love III **d. Tiger Woods**

ANSWERS
IN THE BEGINNING: d. Loren Roberts birdied the first hole of a sudden-death playoff to beat Jerry Kelly for the '96 Greater Milwaukee Open title. Roberts finished 12 strokes ahead of Woods.
TIGER TAMER: Veteran Ed Fiori shot a 67 in the final round and won the Quad City Classic by two strokes. It was Fiori's fourth Tour win but his first in nearly 15 years.
THIS WEEK'S MATCHUP: 1. c; 2. b; 3. d; 4. a
CALL TO ORDER: 1. Duval (59); 2. Love (60); 3. Woods (61); 4. O'Meara (62)

FROM TOP: SCOTT WHEELER; DAVID PIERINI; JIM LUZZI; JASON AYER/UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA; DAVID DOYLE; ROBIN TRIMARCHI; JIM LUZZI

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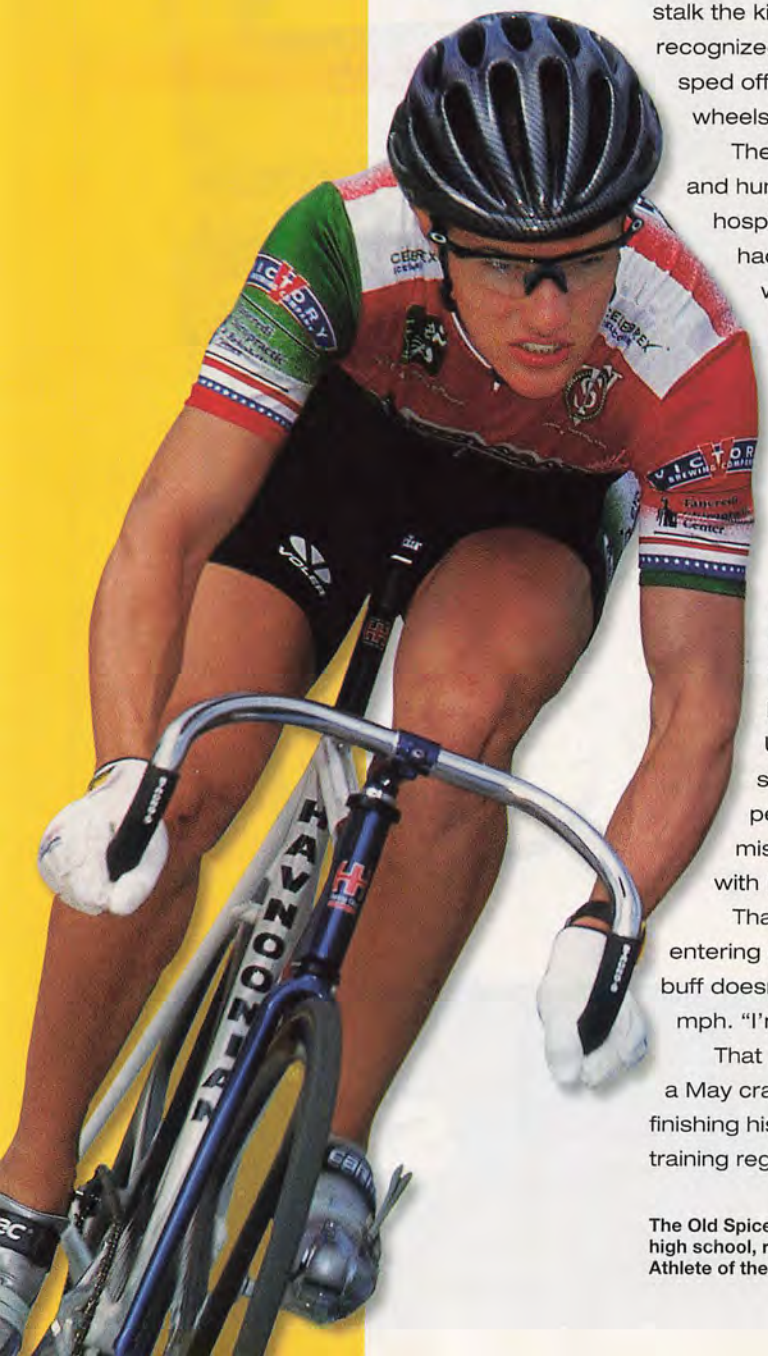
OLD SPICE ATHLETE OF THE MONTH

DANDY ANDY

LAKATOSH HAS SPRINTED TO FOUR NATIONAL AGE-GROUP RECORDS AND SIX U.S. JUNIOR TITLES.



AS BIKE RACES GO, THE SPRINT BETWEEN 15-YEAR-OLD ANDY Lakatosh and 29-year-old Marty Nothstein at the 2000 U.S. cycling championships was a mismatch. Nothstein established an early lead, as expected, then decided to toy with Lakatosh by stopping in the middle of the track to let the younger rider pass. He would playfully stalk the kid from behind and blow by near the end. But Lakatosh recognized the ploy and pulled up. For 30 seconds, before Nothstein sped off to the victory, two of America's fastest men on two wheels perched next to each other, balancing on their pedals.

The moment was priceless for the pair. They are good friends and hunting partners delivered by the same doctor in the same hospital near their hometown of Trexlertown, Pa. And Lakatosh had been training under Nothstein, who a month later would win match sprint gold at the Sydney Olympics. "He's my idol," Lakatosh says. "When I saw him win I said, 'That's what I really want, that top spot on the podium.' "

He seems to be on his way. The Old Spice Athlete of the Month, now 17, has won six U.S. junior sprint titles in the past five years. He holds four national time records in the 14- and 16-and-under divisions and is a strong candidate for the 2004 Olympic team.

In April at Havana's Copa Cuba, Lakatosh rode a 200-meter heat in a blistering 11.04 seconds. That time qualifies him for more globe-trotting—he is now eligible for the U.S. team headed to the world junior championships in Melbourne next month. After that Lakatosh will race in the U.S. senior nationals, where he finished eighth in the match sprint last year. Not bad considering cyclists don't usually peak until their late 20s. "He's a teenager, and he still makes mistakes racing," says Gil Hatton, who coaches Lakatosh with Nothstein. "But for the most part, he's pretty on top of it."

That's true in the classroom as well. Lakatosh has a 3.8 GPA entering his senior year at Parkland High, but the math and science buff doesn't overanalyze while zipping around a banked oval at 40 mph. "I'm basically thinking go, go, go," he says.

That mind-set didn't change a bit after he broke his collarbone in a May crash. Two weeks later he was again riding in the twilight after finishing his homework. "It doesn't bother me at all," he says of his training regimen. "I can't imagine doing anything else."—*Jordan Hyman*

The Old Spice Athlete of the Month Award recognizes outstanding male amateurs in high school, recreational and other sports programs. The 10th-anniversary Old Spice Athlete of the Year will be announced in the Dec. 16, 2002, issue.

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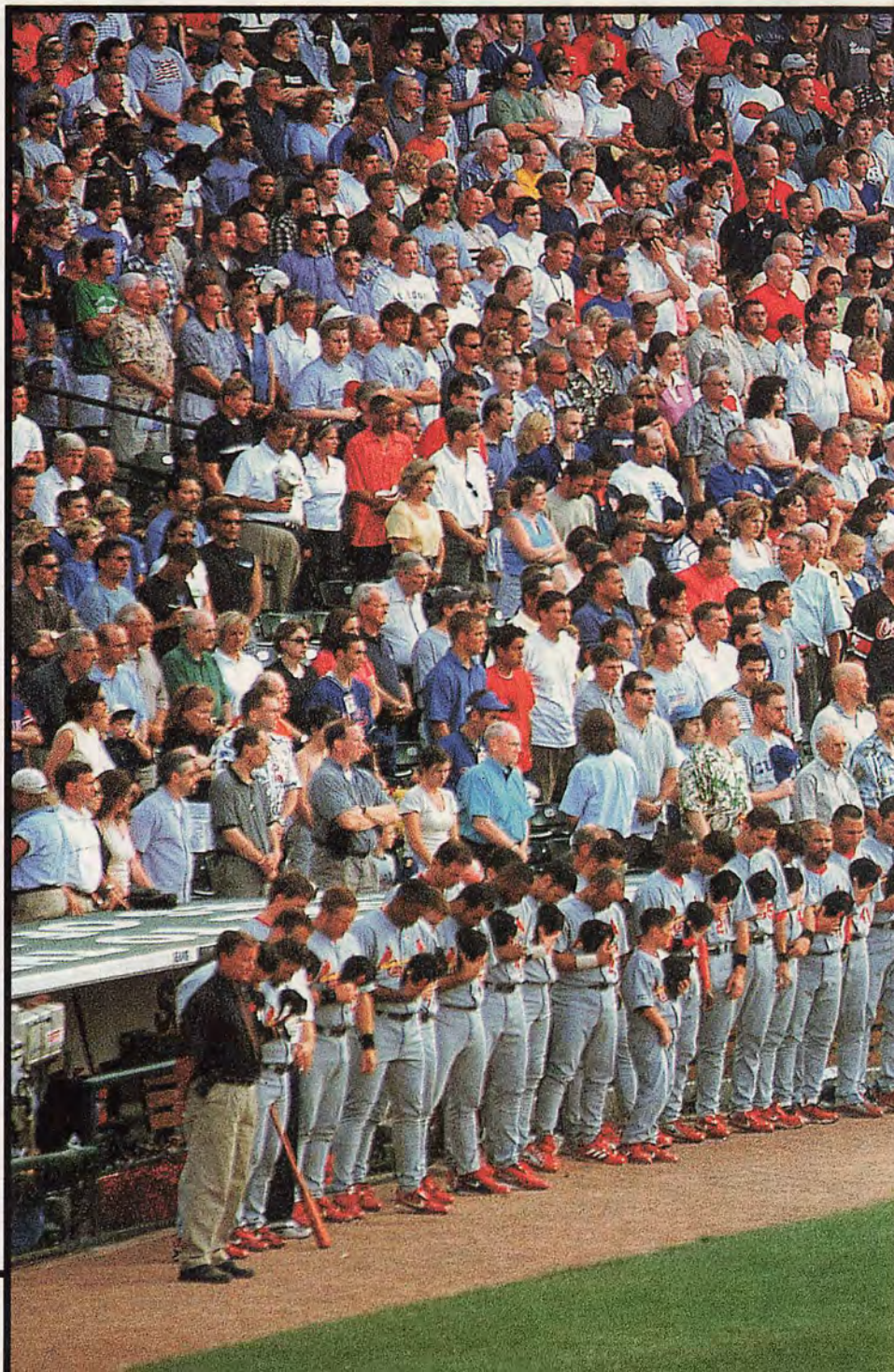
Sports Illustrated

HEARTBROKEN

The death of St. Louis pitcher **Darryl Kile** stunned a team and a city already mourning the loss of a beloved broadcaster

BY STEPHEN CANNELLA



ON SUNDAY NIGHT, at normally boisterous Wrigley Field, the St. Louis Cardinals and the Chicago Cubs played a game in near silence. No raucous pregame activities, no ceremonial first pitch. No music blaring from the loudspeakers before every at bat, no beery seventh-inning sing-along of *Take Me Out to the Ballgame*. Not even the trademark first-inning sprint into rightfield and salute to the Bleacher Bums by Sammy Sosa. Instead there was a moment of silence before the first pitch, the crack of the bat and the pop of the glove during the game, and the shedding of tears in the visitors' dugout.

Players and fans at Wrigley were in mourning for St. Louis righthander Darryl Kile, who died in his sleep in a Chicago hotel room early last Saturday. An initial autopsy found that Kile, 33, suffered from coronary arteriosclerosis and that two arteries to his heart were 80% to 90% blocked. It was the second jarring loss in four days for the

Cardinals, following the death of Hall of Fame broadcaster Jack Buck *(box, page 41)*.

With 39,000 fans already settled into their seats, Saturday afternoon's game was called off 15 minutes after the scheduled start. Cubs catcher Joe Girardi, with his teammates gathered behind him, stood at a microphone in front of the Cubs' dugout and announced the postponement, due to a "tragedy in the Cardinals' family."

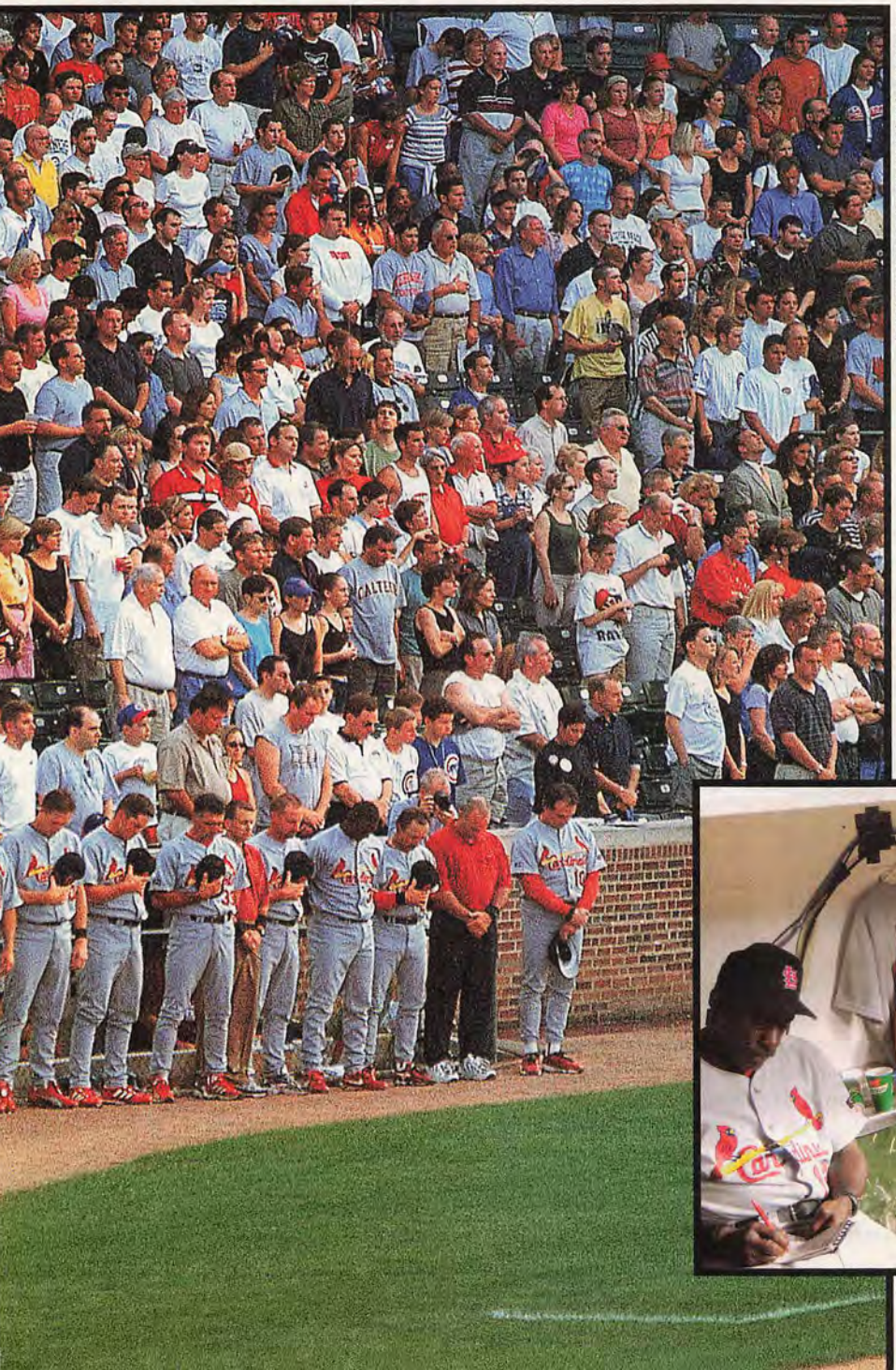
Neither team was in the mood to play on Sunday, either, but the Cardinals—after team gatherings on Saturday night and Sunday morning and consultation with Kile's wife, Flynn—decided they should play the game to honor the memory of a man who took pride in his competitiveness, durability and reliability. Not once in his 11-year career did Kile go on the disabled list, and since 1996 he had made 216 starts. (Only the Atlanta Braves' Tom Glavine and Greg Maddux made more.) What kind of message would the players be sending if they didn't play? After all, Sunday was Kile's day to pitch, and he never missed a start. Manager Tony La Russa and his staff had privately referred to Kile as John Wayne due to his grittiness.

On June 18, in his best outing of the year, Kile had pitched St. Louis to the top of the National League Central for the first time since April 15, allowing one run in 7⅔ innings of a 7–2 win over the Anaheim Angels. But the joy of victory was tempered by the death that night of Buck, the patriarch of the franchise. La Russa and general manager Walt Jocketty attended Buck's funeral outside St. Louis on Friday morning and arrived in Chicago only minutes before the series opener that afternoon.

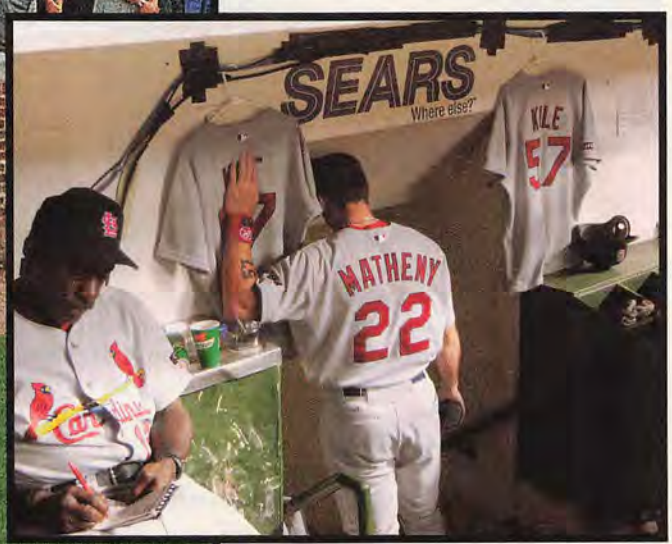
Less than 24 hours later Kile was found dead by hotel security, and pennant races suddenly seemed insignificant. With a pair of Kile's jerseys hanging behind their bench and black patches with his number 57 sewn onto their left sleeves, the Cardinals lost 8–3. "You could see the attitude of their players coming to the plate, almost walking with their heads down," Girardi said. "It's amazing they were able to play."

"It's the most devastating thing I've seen on a ball club," said the 57-year-old La Russa. "You see so many strong men, and you're seeing them break down."

Kile kept a low profile with the media, but he was one of the leaders in the St. Louis clubhouse. Although he was only a 30th-round draft pick by the Houston Astros in 1987, out of Chaffey College, a two-year school in his native Southern California, Kile earned a spot in the rotation by '91. While back in California in '88 he met Flynn Behrens, and they were married four years



MIKE FIALA/AFP (KILE); JOHN BIEVER; SCOTT ROVAK (INSET)



SOMBER NIGHT The crowd observed a moment of silence before Sunday's game, and afterward Mike Matheny paid a touching tribute to his batterymate.

later. He won 15 games and threw a no-hitter against the New York Mets in '93. After going 19–7 with a 2.57 ERA in '97, he landed a three-year, $24 million free-agent contract with the Colorado Rockies. Kile quickly became the poster boy for the difficulties of pitching at Coors Field: His trademark pitch, a sharp overhand curve, flattened out in the thin Colorado air, and in two seasons he was a combined 21–30 with a 5.84 ERA. Despite his struggles Kile won respect for his gutsy attempts to tame the Coors beast—and he never made excuses for his poor performance.

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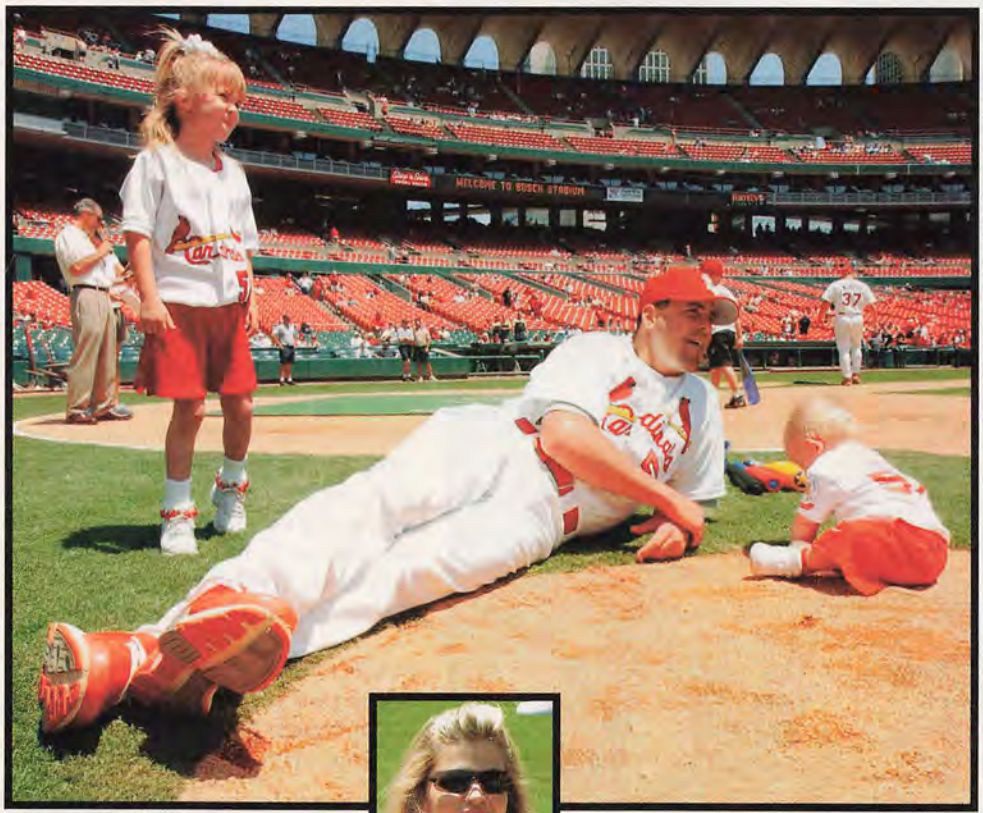


BILL GREENBLATT/UPI, SCOTT ROVAK (INSET)

FAMILY MAN Darryl played with Sierra (left) and Ryker on Father's Day weekend; Flynn talked to her husband hours before he died.

Kile was rejuvenated by a trade to St. Louis before the 2000 season. The bite returned to his curveball, and he won 20 games that year, followed by 16 last season, helping the Cardinals into the playoffs both years. He was also a mentor to the team's young pitchers. Last year he worked closely with lefthander Rick Ankiel, who was trying to regain the control that mysteriously abandoned him late in 2000. Kile also took righthander Matt Morris, a 20-game winner last season, under his wing. The two hung out together on the road, and Morris credits Kile with helping him mature into a successful pitcher. "My numbers might look better, but Kile's the best guy on our staff," Morris said late last year. "He's the ace."

Kile appeared to be fine when most of his teammates last saw him, after the Cubs' 2–1 win on Friday afternoon. That night he ate dinner with his brother Dan and friends at Harry Caray's, a downtown restaurant and sports bar. (According to Cook County medical examiner Edmund Donoghue, Dan said Darryl had complained of right shoulder pain and general weakness.) Kile was back at the team hotel, the Westin Michigan Avenue, by 10:30. Around midnight Morris called from the hotel bar to see if Kile wanted to come down for a beer. Kile declined, saying he was turning in. Shortly before Morris called, Kile had wrapped up a phone conversation with Flynn. She was in San Diego visiting her father and attending to the details of a new house there that the Kiles, whose off-season home is in Englewood, Colo., were planning to move into. The couple's three children—twins Kannon and Sierra, 5, and Ryker, 10 months—were home in suburban St. Louis with Flynn's mother.

Kile wasn't on the team bus that took most of the Cardinals from the hotel to Wrigley the next morning, but that wasn't unusual. He often took a cab to the ballpark so he could arrive early and start his workday. Nor was there reason to be alarmed when Kile wasn't in the clubhouse when the rest of the team arrived at Wrigley by approximately 11:20, three hours before the scheduled first pitch. Perhaps his cab had gotten stuck in traffic. Perhaps he had decided to sleep in; he had told Morris the night before that he was tired.

When Kile failed to show by noon, however, the Cardinals began to worry. Several calls from team officials to Kile's room had gone unanswered. A little after noon the team phoned the hotel security staff and asked them to check on the pitcher. Security and engineering staff members arrived at Kile's 11th-floor corner suite to find a gray PRIVACY PLEASE sign dangling from the door and the safety latch fastened.

As the Cardinals filtered off the field after batting practice, word began to spread that something was wrong. Club p.r. official Brad Hainje asked pitching coach Dave Duncan who would start on Sunday night, if Kile was ill or otherwise unable to take his turn. "I don't know," the worried Duncan said. "I guess [22-year-old lefthander] Bud Smith."

Minutes later the Cardinals learned the staggering news: The hotel staff had forced its way into Kile's room and found him lying in bed as if asleep, wearing eyeshades. The

Jack Buck
1924–2002

The voice of the Cardinals never believed he was bigger than the game

JACK BUCK, whose gravelly baritone was the voice of the Cardinals for nearly half a century, often joked about how the news of his death would be received by his listeners.

"Did you hear Jack Buck died in the booth?" asks the first.

"That's too bad," responds the second. "Did the Cards win or lose?"

When Buck, 77, died on June 18 after a lengthy illness, fans were far more somber. It was a reaction Buck never would have expected, because self-deprecation was one of his many admirable traits. At the dedication of a statue in his likeness outside Busch Stadium in 1998 he quipped, "I've given the Cardinals some of the best years of my life. Now I'm going to give them some of the worst."

Remarks like that were what made him so charming. He was unquestionably famous, but he didn't revel in the spotlight. "Jack never turned his back on the idea that you can use recognition that comes from broadcasting to do something besides help your career," says Bob Costas, who got his break at KMOX radio when Buck was the sports director.

To Buck that meant being the emcee at scores of charity events a year, writing a book of poetry to benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation or simply brightening the day of a group of his fans by hanging out with them. So beloved was Buck that his passing was front-page news in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and the paper ran a 10-page commemorative section on the day he was buried. Flags flew at half-staff all over the city. A public viewing of his casket at Busch drew 10,000, the biggest baseball send-off since Babe Ruth lay in state at Yankee Stadium for two days in 1948.

Buck, whose son Joe is the lead baseball announcer for Fox Sports and a Cardinals announcer, did the radio broadcast of *Monday Night Football* for 16 years and spent two seasons as the lead play-by-play man for CBS's baseball broadcasts in the early 1990s. Most of his work in St. Louis was for KMOX, which has a nighttime signal that can reach 42 states. For those fans unlucky enough to live in a city without a major league team in the days before cable TV, Buck's voice was often the only option—and a pretty good one, at that.

By the time he had called his final game, last October, it was hard to find a sports fan in America who couldn't recognize his voice. In St. Louis they remember the great calls that hailed the great Cardinals moments. Take your pick between Ozzie Smith's homer to beat the Dodgers in the 1985 National League Championship Series ("Go crazy, folks! Go crazy!") and Mark McGwire's 61st homer in '98 ("Pardon me while I stand and applaud").

At services last Friday, Buck's daughter Christine said, "He never really got it. He never understood what he meant to this community. He always said, 'I'm a modest man with a lot to be modest about.' We would beg to differ." —*Mark Bechtel*

WORD OF MOUTH Buck (left) and Harry Caray were a formidable one-two punch on early Cardinals broadcasts.

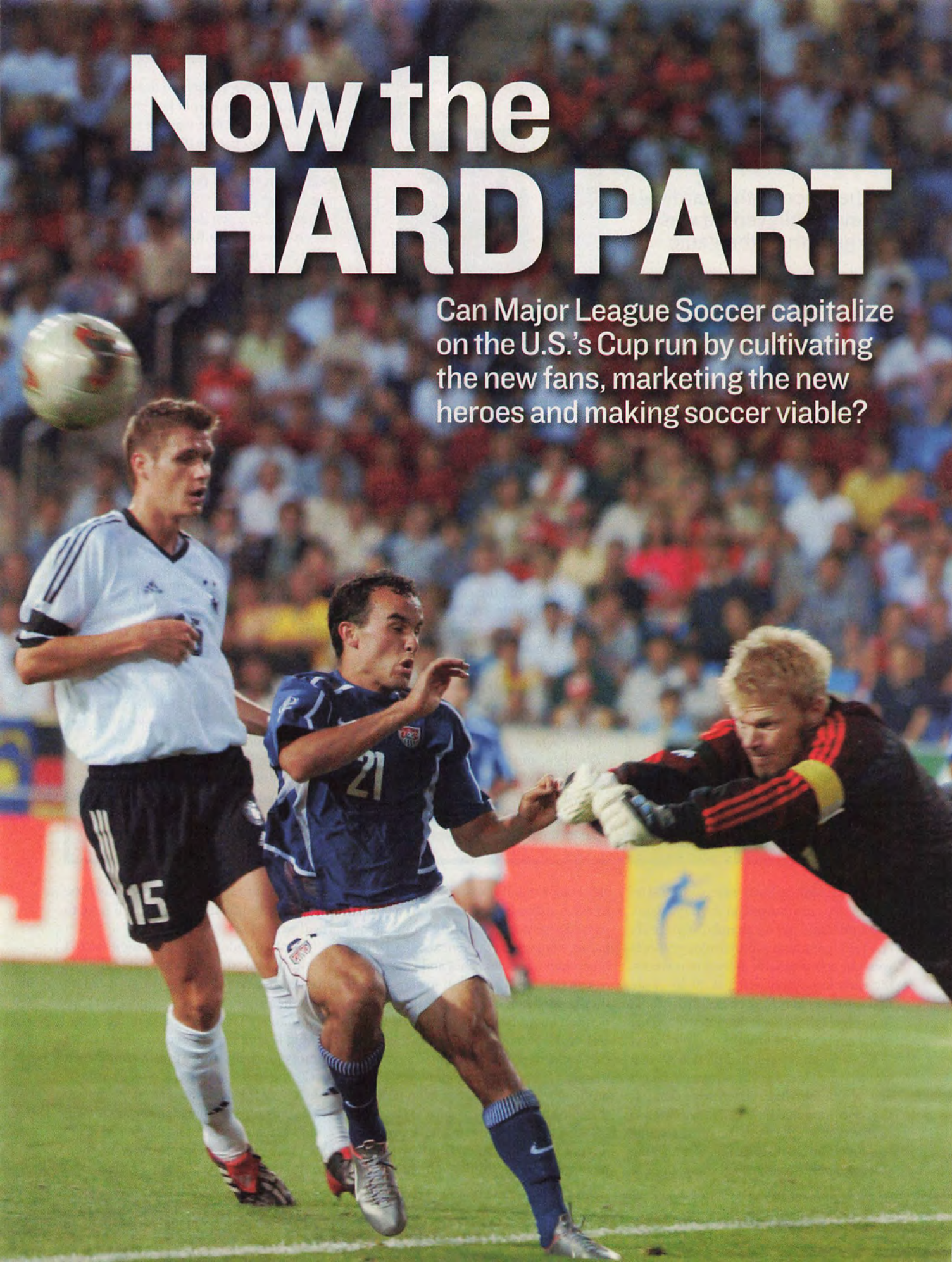
TOM GANNAM/AP (TOP); ALLIED PHOTOCOLOR

TV remote control was next to him. His valuables were arranged on the nightstand, his clothes laid out on an upholstered easy chair. Full autopsy and toxicology reports won't be completed for at least four weeks, but early indications are that the blockage in the arteries may have caused arrhythmia (an irregular heartbeat) that interrupted the blood supply to the brain.

Kile's father, David, had died at 44 of a stroke, which is caused by an arterial blockage or a hemorrhage. Even with that red flag, doctors would have had little reason to perform an angiogram, the most reliable test for coronary disease, on such a young patient as Kile unless he had complained of chest pains or failed a stress test. According to the Cardinals' medical staff, Kile had passed a physical in spring training and hadn't complained to them about anything other than muscular aches and pains since.

The Cardinals were still in shock when they headed home on Sunday night. Competition might be their only escape for the rest of the season. "During the game you can concentrate on playing," says Cubs manager Don Baylor, a teammate of Angels outfielder Lyman Bostock, who was shot to death after a game in Chicago late in the 1978 season. "Players will have problems during the downtime. That's when you have a chance to think about things and reflect on your teammate. It's probably one of the most difficult things they'll have to deal with as players."

As of Monday the Cardinals hadn't decided who would replace Kile full time in their rotation. Most likely they'll call up a pitcher from Triple A Memphis, perhaps righthander Travis Smith, who has limited big league experience, or righthander Jimmy Journell, a 1999 fourth-round draft pick who was 3–3 with a 2.70 ERA at Double A New Haven before being called up to Memphis on Monday. The Cardinals will find someone to take the mound in Kile's stead. Filling the empty place in their hearts will be more difficult. □



Now the HARD PART

Can Major League Soccer capitalize on the U.S.'s Cup run by cultivating the new fans, marketing the new heroes and making soccer viable?

BY GRANT WAHL

SORE, JET-LAGGED and running on the fumes of worldwide acclaim, Landon Donovan sprinted onto the Spartan Stadium turf last Saturday night for the final minutes of the San Jose Earthquakes' 4–0 home win over the Colorado Rapids. Only 38 hours earlier Donovan, the U.S.'s breathtaking 20-year-old striker, had tearfully trudged off another field, in Ulsan, South Korea, after Germany had ended the Americans' stirring World Cup run with a 1–0 quarterfinal defeat. But who needs R and R when you're trying to grow Major League Soccer? "It's important for all of us to get back here on our teams," said Donovan, who traveled on to New York City on Sunday to make the talk-show circuit. "Everything's just crazy right now."

Keeping it that way will be the hard part for U.S. soccer. As difficult as reaching the World Cup's elite eight may have been, turning the sport into a viable domestic enterprise is a far more daunting challenge. Now that the Yanks have proved they can compete at the highest level, what comes next? Will soccer be like track and field, another niche sport in which Americans excel but the masses watch only once every four years? Or will MLS someday be the country's fifth major league, with popularity comparable to the NHL's?

Whatever happens, nobody in MLS expects the U.S.'s World Cup success to turn the seven-year-old league into a rival of the NFL, the NBA and Major League Baseball. "There's no lightning in a bottle," says MLS commissioner Don Garber, a former NFL marketing honcho. "One of our biggest challenges is persuading the media of what we want to become. In their minds we're aspiring to be the NFL, but we're not. We're aspiring to pack 20,000- to 25,000-seat soccer stadiums on Saturdays. We're aspiring to have stronger television ratings, to continue developing top-level players and to have great relationships with our local communities. We're not going to start filling up Giants Stadium. This is about slowly growing the sport."

If anyone doubted that Americans could play this game, snapshots from the Germany match provided indisputable evidence to the contrary. There was Donovan, fearlessly nutmegging midfielder Dietmar Hamann on the dead run and firing a screamer off the fingertips of Oliver Kahn. There was right back Tony Sanneh, launching himself on an 80-yard jailbreak one minute, heading the ball just wide of the goal the next.

WRATH OF KAHN Donovan (21) and others had chances, but the German keeper held firm.

There was midfielder Claudio Reyna, suddenly the bold instigator, trash-talking the Germans and starting every attack. Michael Ballack's first-half header off a free kick from the right may have given the mistake-free Mannschaft the victory, but it was the fluid Americans who won over impartial soccer fans, creating more scoring chances and responding with grace after referee Hugh Dallas failed to call a penalty following a clear German handball on the goal line. "I'm not [afraid] to say that we were the better team," Reyna said afterward, and he was right.

U.S. soccer has made big splashes before—at the 1994 World Cup and the '99 Women's World Cup—but this time a pro league is already in place to capitalize on the buzz. MLS players filled 11 of the 23 spots on the U.S. World Cup roster and struck five of the six goals scored by Americans. League attendance, after stagnating for five years, had risen slightly to an average of 15,294 at week's end, a figure comparable to arena sports such as hockey and basketball. A 22,555-seat soccer-only facility houses the Columbus Crew, and ground has been broken on a $100 million complex in Carson, Calif., which will include a 27,000-seat stadium for the Los Angeles Galaxy and a national training center.

TONY GUTIERREZ/AP

STAR IN STRIPES Though Reyna sparked a superior attack, the U.S. bid the Cup farewell.

Still, despite soccer's massive youth-participation numbers and surprisingly good World Cup ratings—the U.S.-Germany match on ESPN was watched in 3.8 million households, the biggest soccer audience in the network's history, though it kicked off before breakfast—there's no guarantee that more viewers will now tune in to MLS

PHOTOGRAPH BY SIMON BRUTY

BRIAN McBRIDE, 30
Forward, Columbus Crew

Best U.S. attacker in the air, he netted a pair of Cup goals and set up one more.

games, whose ratings have been microscopic. Will enough Americans watch to deliver the league a sizable TV contract, one that would eat into losses in excess of $250 million over the past six years? Not for nothing did MLS shutter the Miami Fusion and the Tampa Bay Mutiny in January, reducing itself to 10 teams.

Yet MLS must continue to serve as the national team's primary feeder system if Americans are to keep improving in the World Cup. With commitments from its television and sponsorship partners through 2006, the league has at least four years to approach profitability. Here are some ways it might use the U.S.'s World Cup performance as a springboard:

• *Hold onto as many young stars as possible and market the hell out of them.* Besides Donovan, many of the Yanks' most entertaining attackers ply their trade domestically: midfielder DaMarcus Beasley, 20, of the Chicago Fire; striker Clint Mathis, 25, of the New York/New Jersey MetroStars; forward Brian McBride, 30, of the Columbus Crew; and striker Josh Wolff, 25, of the Fire. While the Cup raised their profiles Stateside, it also piqued the interest of wealthy European clubs, which will probably want to purchase their contracts from MLS. (The league negotiates all of its players' deals.)

"Those people assuming that all of our players are going to Europe will be proven resoundingly wrong," says MLS's Gazidis.

DaMARCUS BEASLEY, 20
Midfielder, Chicago Fire

Flashed speed and skill on the left flank.

Despite claiming in the past that they would do little to stand in the way of players who want to go to Europe, MLS executives now say they're unlikely to sell their most popular assets for a quick buck. "Those people assuming that all our players are going to Europe will be proven resoundingly wrong," says deputy commissioner Ivan Gazidis, who signed Wolff to a four-year, $1.1 million extension at the start of the Cup. "In 12 months the vast majority of this group will still be in MLS."

Beasley and Donovan are the most coveted players of the bunch, but while Beasley has been clear about his desire to go overseas, Donovan is strikingly ambivalent. "I don't want to go back and sit on the bench for five years," he says. Bayer Leverkusen, the German club that signed him at 16, banished him to its reserve team before loaning him to MLS last year. Donovan, who led San Jose to last year's MLS Cup, says he'll stay with the club for the rest of this season—and maybe longer. "My experience was pretty bad in Germany," he says, "and sometimes I think no matter where I go, it's going to be the same way. I love my life in San Jose."

• *Take the next step in player development.* The idea of bypassing NCAA soccer to develop elite players came up, oddly enough, at one of college sports' sacred grounds, Legion Field in Birmingham, where former U.S. Soccer Federation president Alan Rothenberg watched Argentina spank the U.S. 3–1 during the 1996 Olympic under-23 tournament. "Their college kids are better than our college kids," Rothenberg remembers saying, knowing full well that the Argentines hadn't gone to college at all. (Instead, a handful were playing in Italy's elite Serie A.)

Thus sprang the idea for Project 2010, the USSF's bold plan to put the U.S. in contention to win the 2010 World Cup. Since then the onus for grooming prospects outside college has rested jointly with MLS (whose Project-40 lets a limited number of elite players join MLS teams while earning college tuition) and the USSF, which established a full-time residency camp for the under-17 national team, which in turn produced Beasley and Donovan. But in order to widen the talent search, development—in the form of youth and reserve squads—should become the domain of MLS teams. "That's how they do it around the world," U.S. coach Bruce Arena says. "If it doesn't become a reality, the league is never going to make it."

• *Get the stadiums built.* "It's our biggest challenge," says Garber, who hopes five soccer-only venues will go up in the next five years. Having 25,000-seat facilities would allow MLS teams to set their own schedules, control their own revenue streams and create a demand for tickets that doesn't exist in 75,000-seat NFL hulks. Lamar Hunt, who built the Columbus stadium, the MLS's first soccer-only facility, says he visited every World Cup venue to

GARY M. PRIOR/GETTY IMAGES (MCBRIDE); KIM JAE-HWAN/AFP (BEASLEY)

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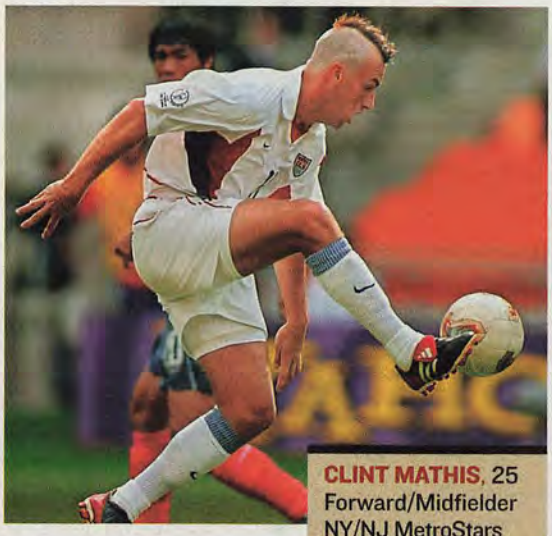
JOSH WOLFF, 25
Striker, Chicago Fire

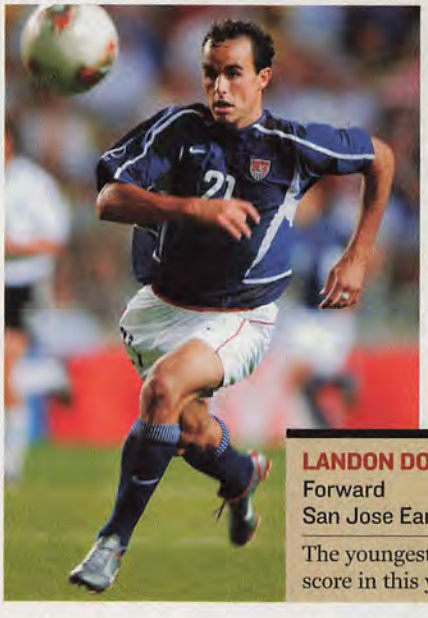
Signed four-year, $1.1 million extension with MLS through 2008.

Can MLS get a sizable TV contract, one that would eat into losses in excess of $250 million over the last six years?



CLINT MATHIS, 25
Forward/Midfielder
NY/NJ MetroStars

Saw limited Cup minutes but is gifted.



LANDON DONOVAN, 20
Forward
San Jose Earthquakes

The youngest player to score in this year's Cup.

get ideas for constructing a stadium for his Kansas City Wizards. Saying it couldn't afford it, the city of McKinney, Texas, dropped its plans to build a publicly funded stadium for the Dallas Burn earlier this year. Perhaps after this World Cup, cities like McKinney will take a longer look at MLS.

• *Continue investing, but do it wisely.* All of the steps above will require millions of dollars, most of them presumably coming from Phil Anschutz, the reclusive Denver billionaire who owns six of MLS's 10 teams. It was Anschutz who brokered the $40 million deal earlier this year in which MLS bought the U.S.'s English-language TV rights for the 2002 World Cup, the next Women's World Cup (beginning September 2003 in China) and the 2006 World Cup (which will be held in Germany and aired in the U.S. during more viewer-friendly daytime hours). "Our investors have been willing to sink a lot of money into soccer," says Gazidis. "If we believe something makes sense, we'll do it." Now, however, as a result of this World Cup and the possible expenses involved in keeping top players, "we may have to face some tough decisions earlier than we anticipated," Garber says.

• *Compete internationally as much as possible.* Since fans enjoy World Cup–style rivalries, MLS should use U.S. soccer's newfound respect to finagle invitations to the Copa Libertadores, the South American club tournament that is the Western Hemisphere's version of the European Champions League. (If Mexican teams are allowed to play, the U.S. certainly deserves entry after eliminating the Tricolores from the World Cup.)

• *Fight harder for media coverage.* The biggest newspapers in six of the 10 MLS markets—Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Denver, Kansas City and San Jose—didn't send a reporter overseas to cover the World Cup. "Hopefully, respect for the sport will get better after this," says Arena. "The league's had such a difficult time getting good exposure. I hope the media recognizes that soccer has a great future in this country."

Indeed, as the U.S. bus pulled into the team's hotel in Seoul in the wee hours last Saturday morning and the players sang *My Way* on the vehicle's karaoke machine, it was hard not to look forward to 2006. Though Arena hasn't yet signed a new contract, it's likely that he'll be back, leading a team composed largely of MLS players who are younger but more experienced than most of this year's squad. You never know who might start in Germany. Beasley and Donovan were 16-year-old high school students during World Cup '98.

For four years the U.S. players read and heard plenty about their last-place finish in 1998. Let the record show that in World Cup 2002 these Yanks finished eighth, ahead of defending champ France, Argentina, Italy and Portugal—four of the pretournament favorites. They lasted just as long as fellow quarterfinalists Spain and England, two of Europe's elite teams. And they came within two games of the World Cup final. "People who say the U.S. will never win the World Cup don't know what they're talking about," says Beasley, a smile creasing his callow mug. "It will happen one day, and I will laugh at Europe when it does." □

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WNBA rookie **Sue Bird** has the game and the charm to become the most popular female team-sport athlete ever

THE SKY'S The Limit

BY KELLI ANDERSON

SUE BIRD stands in the wings of the gym at Fern Hill Elementary School in Tacoma, Wash., calmly assessing the audience she is about to address. She looks straight ahead but sees everything around her. Everything. Before she is introduced, she turns to her left and plucks a stray hair from a reporter's sweater. "Sorry," she says with a smile. "That was bugging me."

Now she takes the microphone and starts working the crowd of third-, fourth- and fifth-graders sitting on the floor. She is there to promote the Seattle Storm, the team that picked her No. 1 in April's WNBA draft, and the kids have some questions for her. "Are you better than Kobe Bryant?" "Do you have your own limo?" "Can you do the splits?" No to all of the above. Bird has questions for them, too. "What do you guys listen to? 'N Sync?"

No!

"Backstreet Boys?"

Nooooo!

"Britney Spears?"

Adamant noes all around. Wary of another defensive stop, Bird adjusts. "Usher?"

Yes!

"Lil' Romeo?"

Yessss!

"Bow Wow?"

The kids practically cheer. Now she can tell them, and they'll believe her: "See, I'm like you guys."

If there is one thing that Sue Bird can depend on, both on and off the court, it is her ability to read a situation and make a connection. In truth, last year's consensus college player of the year *is* a lot like Fern Hill's students: She orders Shirley Temples in restaurants, is hooked on *Friends* and sometimes makes goofy faces when the TV camera is on her. Pretty, quick-witted and not too imposing at 5' 9", she fits in anywhere. "There were probably 20 cliques in high school," says her mother, Nancy, a high school nurse in Syosset, N.Y., "and Sue was included in every one."

On the court, however, Bird is not like anybody else. Nearly three months removed from the end of a storied 39–0 senior season at Connecticut in which she won her second national title, Bird is quickly establishing herself as the new standard in women's point guards. She wasted no time in taking over the Storm, a team that went a combined 16–48 in its first two years. In Seattle's first four games this season, all played without the team's leading scorer from 2001, 6' 5" Lauren Jackson, who was out with a sprained

ROBERT BECK

FOCAL POINT The top pick in this year's draft, the playmaking Bird is taking Seattle by storm.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ART STREIBER/MONTAGE

right ankle, Bird led the Storm to a surprising 3–1 start by averaging 19.0 points and 6.3 assists and displaying the full array of pull-up jumpers, three-point shots, no-look passes and crossover dribbles that made her famous at UConn. In the eight games since Jackson's return, Seattle has gone 3–5, but Bird has continued to impress.

"Point guards like her don't come along very often," says Seattle G.M. and coach Lin Dunn, who resisted a number of tempting offers for Bird before draft day, including one from the New York Liberty—reportedly for sharpshooting forward Crystal Robinson and guard Becky Hammon—and another from the Washington Mystics, who would have swapped the third and fourth picks to take Bird. "She has great court vision and surprisingly good speed and quickness. She can score, pass and handle the ball, and she can lead. Her presence on the floor makes everybody better. There are point guards in the world who can do some of those things, but not all of those things."

"Sue plays the game one or two passes ahead of everyone else," adds Storm assistant coach Carrie Graf. "She is one of those great players for whom the game, as quick as it is, seems in slow motion."

While other coaches use the terms *throwback* and *old school* to describe Bird, a player with her package of skills, vision and instinct—rare enough in the NBA (think John Stockton and Jason Kidd)—is something new in the women's game. Most WNBA point guards are either playmakers who can run the offense but aren't scoring threats, or converted shooting guards with limited playmaking skills. Bird can score (her 45.9% career three-point shooting is the best in UConn history), yet she also elevates all the players around her. League president Val Ackerman calls Bird "a new breed of point guard" who represents "an important evolutionary step in the women's game." Barring injury, Bird is the favorite to be the U.S.'s starting point guard at the 2004 Olympics.

If her representatives have their way, Bird will also establish a watermark for women's team-sport athletes in the endorsement world. Charismatic, personable and well-grounded—thanks to her down-to-earth parents, Nancy and Herschel (he's a retired cardiac rehab doctor living in Las Vegas), and four years spent in the check-your-ego-at-the-door program of UConn coach Geno Auriemma—Bird is a marketer's dream. "Unlike any other athlete I've seen, Sue Bird is a natural in all different contexts, with fans, with kids, with media, on the court," says Karen Bryant, the Storm's vice president of operations. "People relate to that, the athlete who seems like the girl next door."

That is one reason Bird's co-manager James Gould predicts that the public "will fall in love with Sue." Gould has already negotiated a three-year deal with Nike and says he has fielded inquiries from sports-drink, automobile, cellular phone and cosmetic companies. He expects Bird to eventually pull down seven figures off the court, dwarfing her $57,500 WNBA salary and placing her above the rarified air occupied by fellow basketball stars Lisa Leslie and Sheryl Swoopes. "This girl is unique," says Gould. "She plays to every market."

Bird is a marketer's dream. The Seattle team store had to reorder Bird jerseys and T-shirts after just one preseason game.

EARLY RETURNS Bird wasted no time showing off her scoring skills and was already the top vote-getter among guards in All-Star balloting.

Case in point: The Seattle team store had to reorder Bird jerseys and T-shirts after just one preseason game. "A lot of the people ordering them are guys," says director of merchandise Jeremy Owen. "That's unusual." There has also been an increase in ticket interest—"much of it from guys referencing Sue," says Bryant—leading the Storm to place ads on sports radio, where it normally wouldn't.

If the stars align, Bird could become the most popular female team-sport athlete ever, blowing by soccer star Mia Hamm, who for all her visibility and marketing success is shy and has faltered in some of her superstar duties by being uncooperative with the press and failing to consistently deliver when the game's on the line. The outgoing Bird, on the other hand, is as reliable in the last minute of a game as she is in the 30 minutes afterward. Against Notre Dame in her junior year she hit a buzzer-beater from 10 feet out to win the game. Last season, when Bird's team was beating opponents by an average of 35.4 points, the opportunities for heroics were slim. This year they will be abundant. "She never plays her best when her team is dominating," says her father. "But those days are over. I think we'll see a much more aggressive player now."

Will we? The one major hurdle to all this predicted glory for Bird is the limited television exposure she's going to get with the Storm, a franchise that has struggled on the court and at the gate. Dead last a year ago in attendance (5,954 a game) and performance (10–22 record, tied for the worst in the WNBA), Seattle was rewarded with one game on NBC this season, and that has already aired. The Oxygen network picked up three more Storm games, and the six-year-old league, still looking for its first profitable sea-

KENT HORNER/WNBAE/GETTY IMAGES

son and a way to boost its slipping TV ratings and stagnant attendance (around 9,000 a game), is scrambling to create other opportunities to capitalize on Bird's buzz. She's likely to appear on ESPN at least once, at the July 15 All-Star Game.

The pressure for Bird to produce on and off the court is intense. She prefers it that way. "I like pressure, I thrive on it," she says. "I like when I'm in a tough spot and have to make a play. While I don't like to think about the kind of pressure that's on me right now, it does motivate me. Now I have something to prove."

She feels that the best way for her to deal with the expectations is to just focus on helping the Storm win. "Right now we need an outside threat," she said. "So I want to hit a couple of shots, get the ball to whoever is open—especially Lauren in the post—make sure everybody is in the right place at the right time, control the game and hopefully get this team to the playoffs. If I do that, good things will follow."

Bird's basketball goals have never been much more complicated than that. She didn't model her game after that of anyone in particular, didn't watch a lot of basketball on TV and, before she got to Connecticut, didn't spend much time outside of practice working on her shot. She was always honing her will to win, however. Growing up in Syosset, Bird was precociously good at every sport she tried: soccer, tennis, track, basketball. After playing with her CYO hoops team at halftime of a St. John's women's game, she was approached by a security guard, who asked if he could have her autograph, saying, "You're going to be important someday." Bird was 11.

FLEDGLING TALENT The lone girl on Syosset's boys' soccer team at 10, Bird is now a hit with kids of all ages.

Before leading Connecticut to those two national titles, she led Christ the King High, a private school in Queens, to two state titles. At both schools she had talented teammates, which had a profound influence on how her game developed. "I can shoot, but all my life I've been surrounded by people I'd rather pass to," she says. "I like to get them going. That's the mentality I've developed."

During practice after the eighth game of her freshman year at UConn, Bird blew out her left ACL and was forced to sit on the bench the rest of the season. "It stunk because I lost a whole year, but I wouldn't change it," she says. "It was probably the best thing that happened to me. It opened my eyes to the fact that I had taken sports for granted. I started playing with a different kind of intensity, like every game was my last. That's still with me a little bit."

Sitting on the bench also gave her new insight into the point guard's role. She watched where her teammates liked to get the ball and observed the way Auriemma read people and pushed their buttons. From the bench Bird gained a layer of knowledge about her teammates that she could add to what she gleaned from her natural curiosity—or "nosiness," as more than one Connecticut teammate has called it. "She understands better than anyone else, here's what I have to do so all five of us can play well together," says Auriemma. "She is in tune with what everybody on the team is feeling and thinking at all times. She has an uncanny sensitivity to others."

That is just one unusual aspect of Bird's high-performance mind. "I call her an idiot savant, because she remembers everything," says her father. "She remembers every player she played against even seven years ago." Bird also has a remarkable memory for song lyrics and movie lines—any of which she is given to blurting out unbidden in the locker room—and just about every turnover she has ever made. In her regular-season debut on May 30, she shook off heavy pressure from Liberty veterans Robinson, Vickie Johnson and Teresa Weatherspoon to lead all scorers with 18 points in a 78–61 loss. But the stat she noticed first was her five turnovers, against six assists. Even though some could be pinned on teammates who weren't ready for her traffic-defying, no-look passes, she took the blame. "Careless turnovers, all my fault," she said later, adding, "I don't mind it being my fault."

This is a rare bird indeed: Takes responsibility, makes her teammates look better, doesn't care about scoring points. As her mother says, "What's not to like?"

Bird does appreciate a compliment now and then, however. The one she would most like to hear, she says after the Tacoma assembly, is that she is fun to watch. A few days later, in a corridor inside Portland's Rose Garden after her team had won its first game, against the Fire, she revises that, saying that the greatest thing someone could say about her is that she helped establish a winning tradition, something she's never had the chance to do before. She looks straight ahead as she says this, then smiles, seeing that day unfold a step or two ahead of everybody else. □

A security guard once saw her play and asked for her autograph, saying, "You're going to be important someday." Bird was 11.

COURTESY NANCY BIRD (TOP); ROBERT BECK

Street TOUGH

By boldly saving all four games of Texas' undefeated World Series run, Huston Street joined his dad as a Longhorns legend

BY JEFF PEARLMAN

NO MATTER what University of Texas sports heroes go on to accomplish after college, they are forever hailed in Austin for what they did as Longhorns. Nearly 25 years after his collegiate gridiron heyday, Earl Campbell remains the Tyler Rose, forever plowing over hapless Aggies and Sooners. Six Cy Youngs down the road, Roger Clemens is neither Red Sox nor Blue Jay nor Yankee, but *Longhorn*. This is not up for debate. It is gospel.

Huston Street, a gangly freshman of 18, has known this truth since he was six. At the time, Huston thought attending a Texas football game with his daddy, former Longhorns quarterback James Street, would be just that: father and son spending a fun Saturday afternoon together at Texas Memorial Stadium. "Dad signed more autographs than the players did," Huston says with a soft twang. "We stayed for three hours after the game was done, my dad signing and signing and signing. It was incredible."

Outside the Longhorn State, James Street is as recognizable as Ed Road or Steve Path. In Austin, however, he is royalty. That's what happens if you lead the Texas football team to a national championship, as James did during the 1969 season (capped by a Cotton Bowl victory over Notre Dame). That's what happens if you help pitch the Longhorns' baseball team into the College World Series, as James did in 1968, '69 and '70. Thirty-two years later James, who did not play professional sports and is now a financial planner, remains that dashing hero in burnt orange and white. For $150, you can buy an autographed, limited-edition print of James running the football from an on-line gallery operated out of Austin. The legions do not forget.

Perhaps that is why, minutes after his son had pitched 1⅔ shutout innings to close out a 12–6 victory over South Carolina in the College World Series final last Saturday, James had tears and sweat and a proud smile on his face. By saving all four of his team's wins at Rosenblatt Stadium in Omaha, Huston Lowell Street became not only the tournament's Most Outstanding Player but also—whether he turns out to be the next Roger Clemens or not—a Longhorns legend, right there with his pop.

On a team known for its Pacific-deep starting rotation, the righthanded Street played the largest role in Texas's first baseball title in 19 years and coach Augie Garrido's fourth in four decades. (Garrido, who became the first coach to win the series with two schools, had won three at Cal State–Fullerton.) In 6⅓ innings of relief, Street allowed a total of two hits and one run while striking out five—a performance that fed the growing perception that he was a closer as invincible as Trevor Hoffman or Mariano Rivera. As South Carolina coach Ray Tanner said the night before his team faced Texas, "You know they have Huston Street waiting. That's not comforting."

HORNING IN After the Longhorns celebrated, the eyes of Texas were on (from right) Huston, James and Janie.

During the final innings of the title game a female fan held aloft a sign that read HUSTON, WILL YOU MARRY ME? To the Streets, this is hilarious, because four months ago the only request the 6-foot, 179-pound Huston got was HUSTON, WILL YOU PLEASE THROW ME ANOTHER MEATBALL? That came from opposing hitters who, while struggling with Street's hard-cutting slider, sat on his fastball, which reached the low 90s but was as straight as a pencil. During February and March, pitching coach Frank Anderson tinkered

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAMIAN STROHMEYER

with Street's motion, dropping his three-quarters delivery a nudge or two lower. "The competitiveness was there, but his stuff wasn't moving enough," says Anderson. "There wasn't much deception."

Street had good stuff in his first three appearances in Omaha; what he had on Saturday was good fortune. When he came on in the eighth inning against the Gamecocks, Texas was beginning to unravel. South Carolina had cut the Longhorns' six-run lead to 8–4 and had runners on first and second with one out. In a 10-pitch at bat shortstop Drew Meyer fought off Street long enough to earn a walk. Centerfielder Justin Harris then hit a grounder to third that should have been an inning-ending, rally-killing double play. While pivoting to throw to first, however, Texas second baseman Tim Moss dropped the ball, allowing two runs to score.

Up stepped Yaron Peters, the Gamecocks' 6' 2", 244-pound slugging senior first baseman, the son of Israeli parents. In Hebrew, Peters's first name translates as "happiness," which is what his team-leading .379 batting average and 29 homers brought South Carolina this season. To become *melech* (king) of South Carolina, however, he would need to accomplish something only two batters had done in 47 innings against Street this season: hit one out of the park. On a 3-and-2 count, Peters—wearing number 32 in honor of his idol, Sandy Koufax—took a monstrous swing through a hanging curve, missing in Kingmanesque fashion. Later, Peters admitted he was thinking home run ("I probably shouldn't have done that," he said), while Street conceded that the ball easily could have wound up in Tel Aviv ("a complete mistake pitch"). Regardless, as soon as the ball landed in his glove, Texas catcher Ryan Hubele pumped his fist and jumped high in the air. Carolina had let its last chance slip away.

DROP DOWN An early-season lowering of the release point in his delivery was the key to Street's darting ball movement.

Even though Peters and the Gamecocks were, for the most part, a likable flock, it was hard to root against the Longhorns, who exuded grace and class. Throughout the series Street displayed the character of a man twice his age, routinely deflecting praise toward his teammates. Indeed, the most heartwarming moment of the tournament came in the postvictory press conference on Saturday, when senior leftfielder Chris Carmichael, whose three-run homer in the fifth was the big blow for Texas, went out of his way to praise Street's maturity and heart. Obviously moved, Street, seated next to Carmichael, reached out and gently held his teammate's right hand. In the rear of the room, Huston's mother, Janie, who's also a Texas graduate, beamed. She and James had raised their boy right.

Later in the day, as Huston waited in a cramped hallway to be interviewed for the official College World Series video, he reflected on his father's status in the eyes of Texans. Ever since his early teens Huston had known that he would follow his dad to Texas. In fact, when other schools, including Baylor, Columbia and Georgia Tech, had asked him to visit, Huston declined. Why waste their time? "I've never thought of it as pressure, having a dad who did so well," said Huston, the lid of a white WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONS hat covering his eyes. "He's my best friend. My role model. My adviser. My hero. It'd be an honor just to be mentioned in the same breath."

The newest Longhorns legend was smiling. That honor is his. □

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SPIN CYCLE Barrera turned both Morales and the fight around, winning five of the last six rounds on all three judges' scorecards.

¡Viva MEXICO!

A stirring rematch between Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales bolstered the notion that Hispanics are giving new life to the fight game

BY RICHARD HOFFER

JOHN JACONO

BODY WORK Though Morales (right) landed the telling blows early, Barrera emerged unmarked and with the decision.

BOXING HASN'T been driven underground so much as it's been driven south of the border. The game now belongs to the Hispanic crowd (both fighters and fans), and anybody who doesn't get with the program is condemned to watching desultory, overhyped and irresponsibly made heavyweight fights and trying to figure where that $54.95 went on a Saturday night—some pay-per-view idea that seemed good at the time but now feels like a bad day at the in-laws'.

The more open-minded, those who aren't so particular about issues of language and nationality, are in for a decidedly better time, and at bargain prices. Last Saturday's rematch between Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales may not have equaled their match in 2000, which was voted Fight of the Year by *Ring* magazine, but it gave more bang for the buck than almost any other fight this year. That Barrera's victory at Las Vegas's MGM Grand was as suspect as Morales's win two years ago is bonus material; on top of world-class action, you got intrigue, carping and paranoia. And all for $39.95 to your cable distributor.

Hispanic fighters, particularly at the lower weights, have been carrying the load for some time now. Julio César Chávez, Oscar De La Hoya and Félix Trinidad have come through to restore our interest in boxing (usually after a lackluster heavyweight performance). But this fight, which had to be promoted to the hinterlands on the basis of athletic prowess alone, might have been a turning point in the sport. An estimated 400,000 households (not to mention a crowd of 12,709) paid to see two fighters whose name recognition anywhere beyond the Southwest was roughly on par with that of a U.S. cabinet member.

The good thing is that those willing to convert, to abandon their old favorites (done with Mike Tyson, anyone?), can do so without a Berlitz course. Many of the Hispanic stars are English-friendly, but even when they aren't, as in the case of Barrera and Morales, the action is easily translated. Some nuances may be lost—without a map of Mexico and a little understanding of class warfare in that country, you miss some of the fun—but the big picture is easy to handle. These guys are delivering frantic fights at cut rates.

The first meeting of the two fighters was one of those mythic matches in which the winner (Morales, by a controversial split decision) threw 868 punches—72 a round. The pace was staggering. The rematch, which took two years and $2 million per featherweight to put together, was pale only by comparison. Morales and Barrera threw *only* 600 punches apiece, *just* 50 per round. But the ebb and flow produced easily as much drama as the first fight and, with another debatable decision, certainly as much bitterness. And the great thing is, the two fighters already hated each other anyway!

Whether there's a third meeting, which would be a good place for the casual fan to sample some international fare, is probably up to the money men. Both Barrera (proudly unmarked) and Morales (quite a bit worse for the wear) were willing to book the third leg of the trilogy. But at evening's end Morales's promoter, Bob Arum, was still stewing over the injustice of the decision. "How can anybody watch boxing anymore?" he asked, which is a curious thing to hear from a man who makes his living convincing people that they absolutely must watch boxing. "I'm finished with this s---."

It was, however, one of those fights in which it was possible to justify any decision.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Morales controlled the first half of the fight, bringing the action to a surprisingly reluctant Barrera. Then Barrera forced himself upon Morales, swelling the defending WBC champion's right eye and bloodying the bridge of his nose. Complicating matters—or, rather, supplying an important debate point—was a body blow that Morales delivered in the seventh. Most observers would have scored Barrera's fall to one hand a knockdown. Referee Jay Nady ruled it a slip. The difference would have produced a three-point swing on two of the judges' scorecards and given Morales the victory.

"A slip," said Barrera afterward.

"A legitimate drop," said Morales, who was so upset by the final decision that he stormed out of the ring upon hearing it (only to recover his sportsmanship and quickly return). "I thought I did enough," he said.

Barrera, who felt so strongly that he was jobbed two years ago that he had to be cajoled into this rematch with promises of top billing, thought all you had to do was look at their mugs after Saturday's fight to see who'd won. "Most important," he explained, "I'm going to celebrate with a clean face."

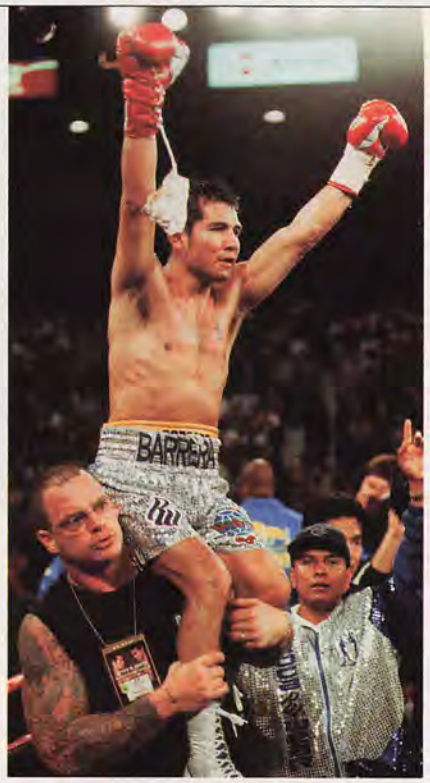
Perhaps more important, the roughly 400,000 pay-per-view buys for a fight between featherweights whom most in the U.S. had never heard of supports Arum's theory that boxing is strictly a Hispanic sport, in both participation and appeal. Certainly it is a Hispanic-oriented business. "Other than a freak heavyweight match," says Arum, "it's very, very difficult to make any real money in boxing without the Hispanics."

Among the Anglo crowd, Arum contends, boxing is basically your grandfather's sport. "It skews old," he says. "That's why networks want no part of it, even though boxing delivers bigger ratings than any piece of crap they put on." And any attempt to skew younger—say, HBO's doomed *KO Nation*—is met with generational resistance. The Hispanic audience, on the other hand, is not only fight-ready but also advertiser-friendly. Boxing on Telemundo, the huge Spanish-language network, delivers that 18-to-29 crowd. Other networks will see the light soon.

For now, though, the real commercial experiment is in pay-per-view. And Arum believes the results have been in for a long time. "For an Oscar [De La Hoya] fight," he says of his preeminent Hispanic draw, "we'll get 40 percent of our numbers from just 12 percent of the population."

Since most of those nine million Hispanic households are in California and the Southwest, that means the sport is, for the moment anyway, as regional as it is ethnic. Going back to 1996, when he offered the De La Hoya–Chávez fight on closed circuit only, Arum has been exploiting this divide. "We did great," he says, "until we crossed the Mississippi and ran out of Mexicans."

"Other than a freaky heavyweight match," says Arum, "it's very, very difficult to make any real money in boxing without the Hispanics."



UPLIFTING Barrera thinks he got jobbed two years ago, but he got the nod in a rematch that could've gone either way.

The polarization has had one unfortunate effect, namely that the old Anglo audience, which is not concentrated in the Southwest, remains largely ignorant of boxing's new vitality. A fighter capable of generating news among the more traditional Anglo audience—Floyd Mayweather Jr., for instance—may have all the East Coast recognition in the world, but he just can't sell tickets the way Barrera or Morales does. "Put Mayweather on pay-per-view?" Arum asks, laughing. "Not unless he fights a Hispanic."

Of course this is just a replay of boxing's heritage; the sport has been supported by one ethnic immigration after another. The difference is that Hispanic immigration, which is now penetrating Kansas and Iowa and Michigan and lots of places east of the Mississippi, will have a far more profound impact on boxing than the waves of Jews and Irish and Filipinos that preceded it.

Still, a fight like Barrera-Morales has a specialized, if disproportionately intense, appeal. The action translates well enough, but some of the promotional subtleties, the kinds of things that sell these events to a broader audience, get lost. The fighters' mutual dislike, which was manifested in a press-conference brawl last December, transcends language and nationality. Everybody understands a guy popping another because he's been called a *mariquita* (sissy) in front of the international media. But rivalries that seem so basic south of the border are mysterious and unexplored here.

For example, though both men are Mexican, they represent radical differences within their country, which after all is pretty big. Morales is from Tijuana, the frontier, while Barrera is from Mexico City, the country's Paris. It's hard to overstate the social distinction. Morales says, "There's an old saying: 'Kill somebody from Mexico City, do something for your country.' "

Barrera, who comes off unbearably privileged compared with a kid who was born in a room over a Tijuana gym, got enough from his brief time in law school to know better than to fan class flames. Yet he wasn't above calling Morales a "dumb Indian," which is just about the worst thing you can say of a fellow Mexican.

This subtext, which is crucial to the proper promotion of fights, wasn't really available to the entire audience this time around. That's too bad. But as Hispanics grow to dominate the sport—as they become the mainstream—the subplots of their fights will be more widely accessible. For now, it's enough that the boxing is refreshingly exciting. And it doesn't hurt that it's a little unpredictable too. □

JOHN IACONO

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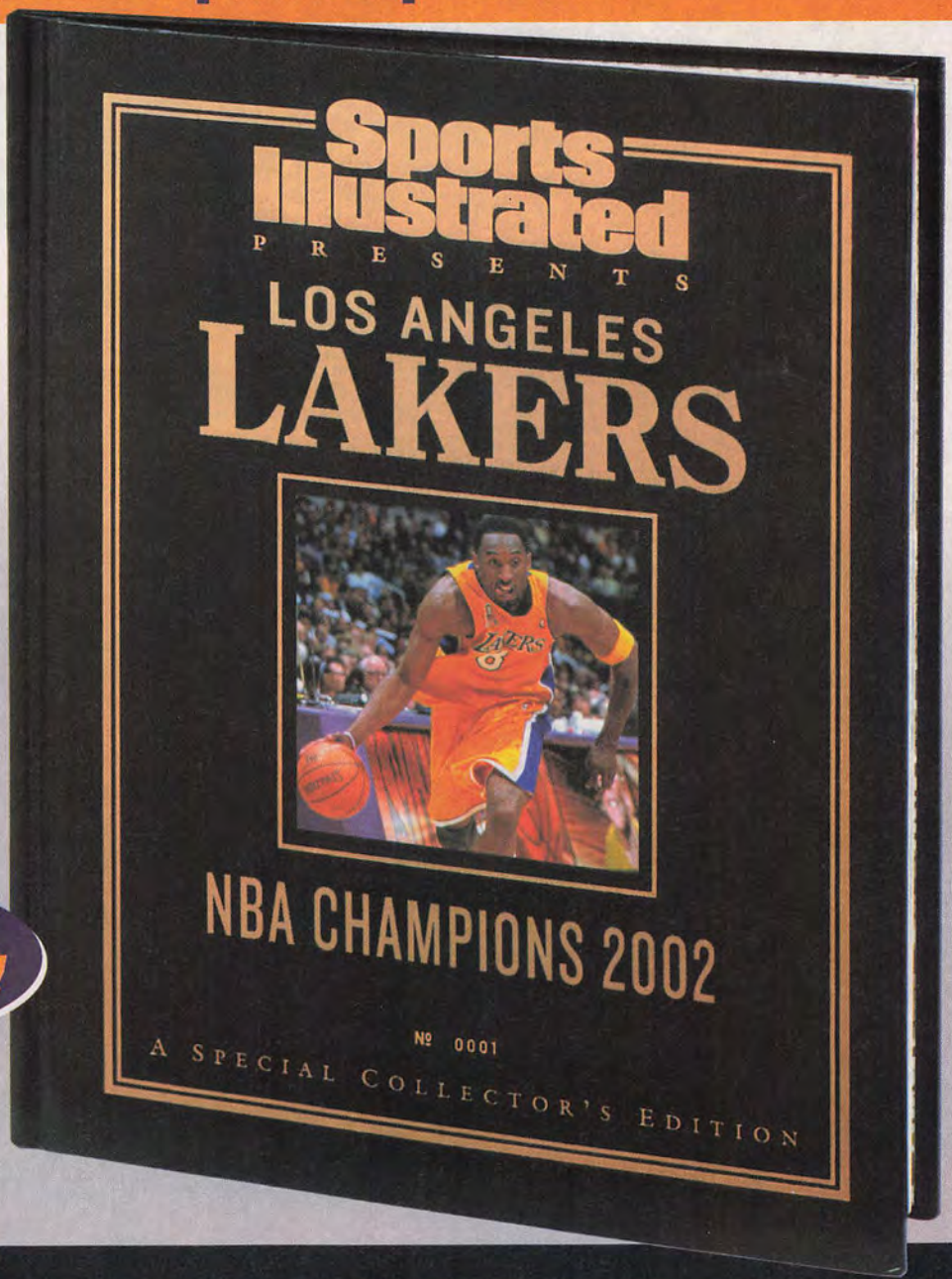

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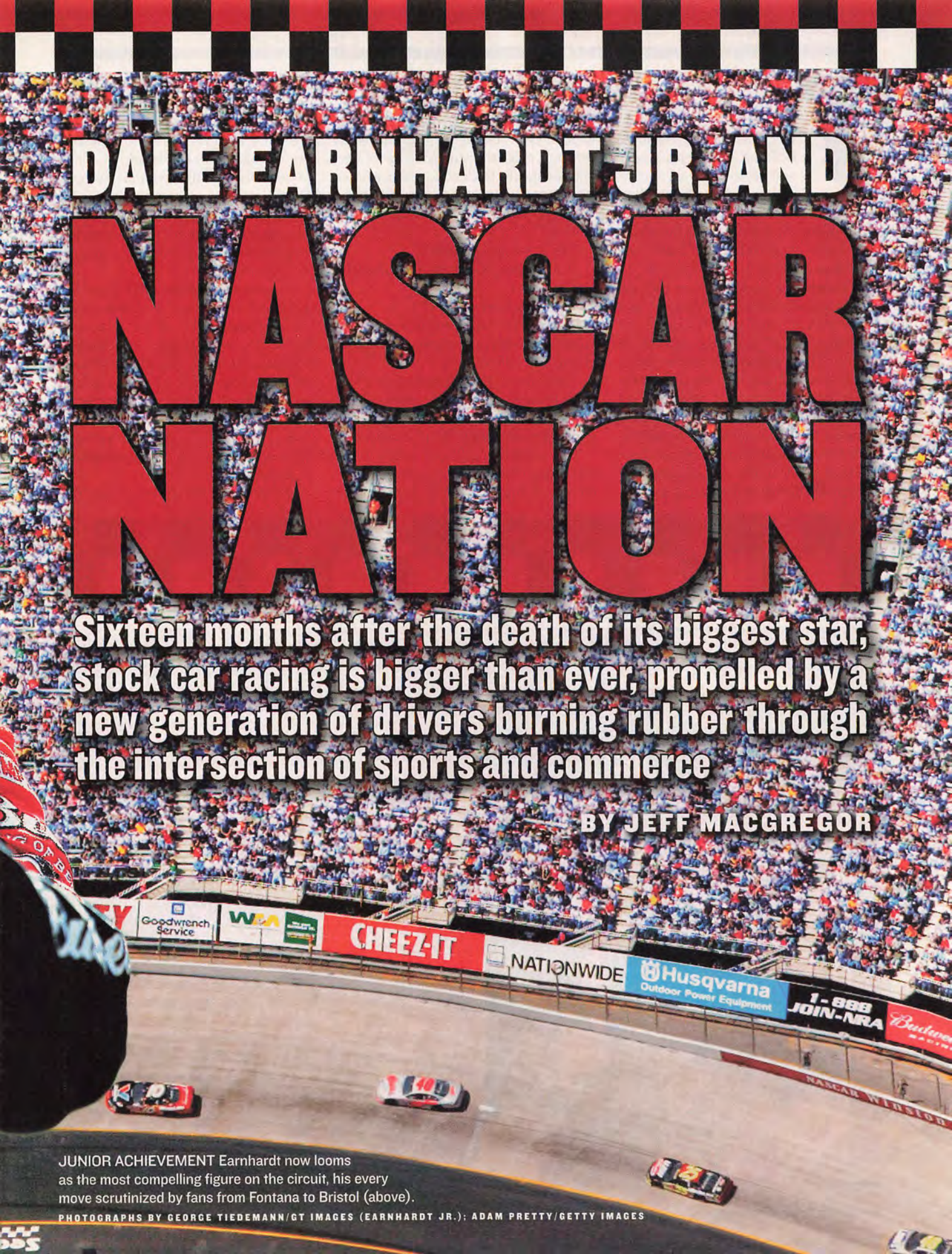
DALE EARNHARDT JR. AND NASCAR NATION

Sixteen months after the death of its biggest star, stock car racing is bigger than ever, propelled by a new generation of drivers burning rubber through the intersection of sports and commerce

BY JEFF MACGREGOR



JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT Earnhardt now looms as the most compelling figure on the circuit, his every move scrutinized by fans from Fontana to Bristol (above).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEORGE TIEDEMANN/GT IMAGES (EARNHARDT JR.); ADAM PRETTY/GETTY IMAGES

THE LINE snakes around the building, folding back again and again on itself. A labyrinth traced by sagging lengths of yellow poly police tape winds through the spears of palmetto and twists across the white-hot decorative gravel, then threads back between some leafless, blasted saplings before wandering all the way out past the molten parking lot until it turns again, back up the alley, hundreds of feet, into the last little rectangle of lifesaving shade left in Daytona, Fla., where it loops the Dumpster twice and finally meanders, unmercifully, back out into that terrifying supertropical sunshine and along the malarial drainage ditch that parallels International Speedway Boulevard. There are hundreds of people in the line. The line does not move. The line only gets longer.

At the racetrack across the street Monday practice is still running wide open, and the whole blinding afternoon buzzes like a hive. Over there the line moves at 185 mph. From the pedestrian footbridge, fans leaving the track notice the sunstruck crowd surrounding the Barnes & Noble.

"Looks like Disneyland from up here, don't it?"

"Those people look baked."

"Those poor folks look like they been clubbed."

"What time's he comin'?"

"I don't know what time he starts, but I know he's gonna have a writer's cramp by the time he's done."

And at nearly that moment Dale Earnhardt Jr. ducks out of a slate-gray SUV and into the side door of the bookstore. He has come here to sign books. Many, many books.

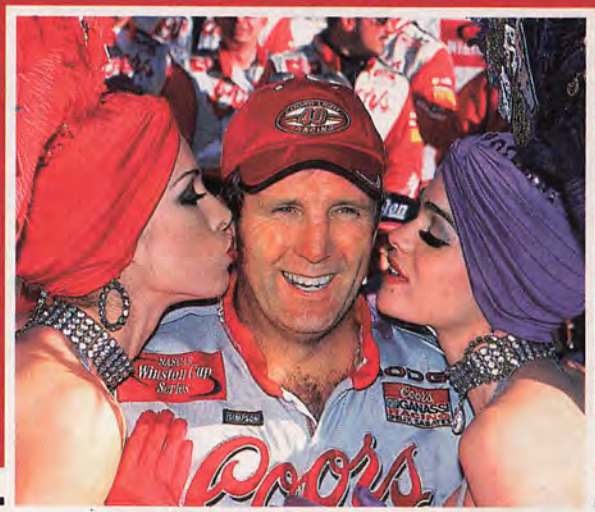
This is February. It is 51 weeks to the day, almost to the hour, since his father was killed, not quite half a mile from here, in the last turn on the last lap of last year's Daytona 500. It is a long time gone and he is mended now and it is safe for him to be here; or it is an excruciation, an aching, heartbreaking effort. No one who is allowed, at last, to walk up for his swooping lasso of a signature can tell which. The weight of that name, the noise in his head, the surge and ebb in his chest are none of their business. He is unfailingly pleasant and polite with everyone.

He wears a red polo shirt and baggy khaki shorts and a red B (as in Budweiser) baseball cap clocked around aft in the trademark manner. He is pale and slender with sharp features and a quick, thin smile that seems to flicker out the moment he isn't paying attention to it. "Good to see you," he says quietly to each of them as they arrive at his table. "GOOD TO SEE YOU!" they shout or shriek or sob in return, unable to modulate themselves a moment longer.

The first fan in line, Charles Long, 27, of

THE NEED FOR SPEED

Those who still think baseball is the national pastime need to have their tires rotated



STOCK CAR RACING is by far the fastest-growing spectator sport in America. Unique in the world, it is a crossover sports-and-entertainment empire set squarely at the confluence of pop culture, commerce and American mythology. NASCAR cites a fan base that comprises nearly one third of our entire population. The prize money, corporate sponsorships, ticket sales, broadcast and cable TV contracts, advertising sales, hotel and restaurant revenues, etc., world without end, push billions of dollars through the economy every year. And just how much money the fans, fully 50% of whom are women, spend on the products whose logos they see emblazoned on the hoods, trunks and quarter panels of the cars, and on the fireproof fronts, backs and bottoms of the drivers themselves, can only be guessed at. Billions more, undoubtedly, on everything from the sponsors' bulldozers to beer to bath mats, from Nike to Tide to Viagra.

Since 1990 attendance figures for the NBA have grown by 20.7%. In the same period NASCAR's attendance rose an astonishing 91%. It has quadrupled since 1980. NASCAR has a consolidated multiyear, multinetwork television package with NBC, Fox, FX and TNT. There are NASCAR theme restaurants and nightly NASCAR-update television shows, NASCAR game cartridges and NASCAR radio networks, NASCAR sheets and NASCAR pillowcases, NASCAR wallpaper and NASCAR telephones, NASCAR silver

HIGH AND LOW NASCAR's fan base stretches from bus drivers to showgirls (here congratulating Sterling Marlin for his win in Las Vegas), and from trackside to the tops of RVs.

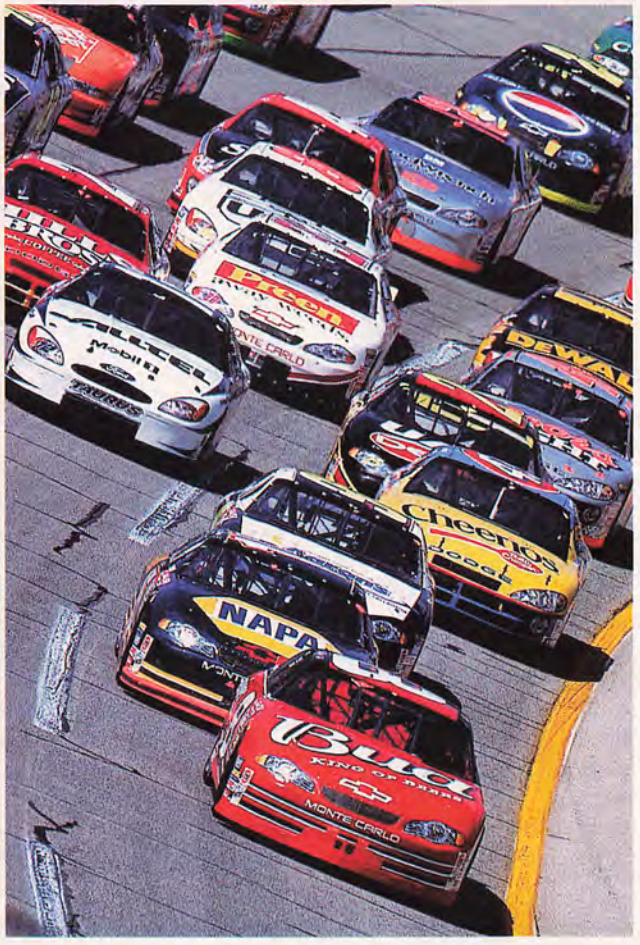
NIGEL KINRADE

Winter Springs, Fla., has been here since 4 a.m. because, he says, "Junior is a regular guy. Just like me. Who drinks beer. Just like me." He hoots and whoops and pumps his fists and jumps up and down when his two copies of *Driver #8* are signed. He is then overrun and subdued for comment by a squad of beautifully groomed local television reporters.

For hours the others will shuffle forward, the mother and daughter teams in from Ohio, the glowering bachelors out of Tennessee, entire tomato-red families down from Jersey. Silent 60-year-old shirtless fat men in straw hats and coveralls, quivering 14-year-old girls blow-molded into their black spandex crop tops, husbands and wives in matching pictographic Dale Jr. T-shirts—everyone has a copy of the book, two copies, three, nine, to be signed. "No other merchandise," shout the book people, "will be signed!" Cameras flash, teenage girls flirt or stare or tremble in their weeping, cops roll their eyes, the line inches forward, people scale the Art & Architecture shelves for a better look. "Junior!" they shout, "Hey, Junior!" until one no-longer-young woman climbs the wedding planners display to croon, "Hellooooooooooo, Sexy!" and everybody breaks up. The thin smile flickers. This is how the book about #8 made it to #4 on *The New York Times* best-seller list.

A mother guides her son toward the table. He is a little boy, maybe nine, 10 years old. "Hey, Buddy," says Dale, Jr., softly. The boy doesn't say anything, nor does he have a book, and he freezes for a second, unsure what to do. His mother nudges him gently from behind. "Go ahead," she says. Expressionless, the boy hands Dale Jr. a picture he's drawn. It is a smudged pencil rendering of Earnhardt's number 8 Budweiser car, complete with cartoon speed lines trailing off the roof and rear spoiler. It is neither precociously good nor unimaginably bad. Earnhardt accepts it and says, "Thank you, Buddy." Someone turns the boy around and his mother says "Smile" but he doesn't, and then the flash explodes blue and white and impossibly cold, and the two of them, man and boy, are frozen together for an instant. Forever.

WHEN I was just a little squirt, I clipped pictures of race cars from magazines and taped them to my bedroom walls. From floor to ceiling and wall to wall ran the elegant and delicate Formula One machines of the mid-'60s, like the Lotus and the BRM, as fragile and complicated as insects, and the factory Ferrari, as low and wide and red as appetite itself. Next to these were the exotic 24 Hour GT-Prototypes from Sebring and Le Mans, the blunt Porsches and the swooping Jaguars and the perfect Ford GT 40s. Among them ran the muscle-bound and slab-sided family sedans from Plymouth and Chevy, big-



services and NASCAR staple guns. Last year NASCAR sold more than $1 billion worth of licensed merchandise. That's an awful lot of novelty shot glasses. There's a NASCAR reality show, a NASCAR television network and a big-money, NASCAR-inspired Britney Spears feature film all on the drawing board.

When Dale Earnhardt, one of the sport's winningest racers and greatest heroes, died in that Daytona crash at the beginning of last season, the national outpouring of grief was something unseen since the death of Elvis. Drive anywhere west of the Hudson River and east of the Hollywood Freeway and you'll see Earnhardt's urgent, red-trimmed number 3 displayed in solemn tribute on hundreds of thousands of bumper stickers and pickup truck window decals. Paradoxically, painfully, his death has been a net benefit to the sport. It was the kind of seismic tragedy that sets in motion a tidal wave of media interest, thereby attracting attention from even those pockets of the American public previously unmoved by the sport. Dale Earnhardt's last act was to set the stage for NASCAR's next generation of epic successes. —J.M.

GEORGE TIEDEMANN/GT IMAGES (ABOVE); NIGEL KINRADE

block Detroit iron, their V-8 pistons fat as feed buckets, thundering around the Southern stock car circuit. Beside these were the last of the bulging, broad-shouldered front-engine Indy cars, as poky and old-fashioned as stagecoaches even then.

I scissored out pictures of the drivers, too, and around the room grinned the heroic faces of Hill and Clark and Stewart, the Unsers and the Pettys, Foyt, Andretti, Yarborough and Lorenzen, even the great Fangio. I dreamed of being one of them.

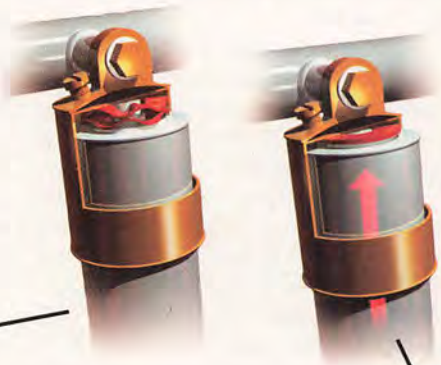
At night, in the desolate freedom of those dreams, I moved across a shadow landscape at terrifying speeds, goggled and tattooed with grime, an eight-year-old boy with a front-page smile, rakish and death-defying, trailing a white silk scarf and the noise of a distant crowd. Speed was everything.

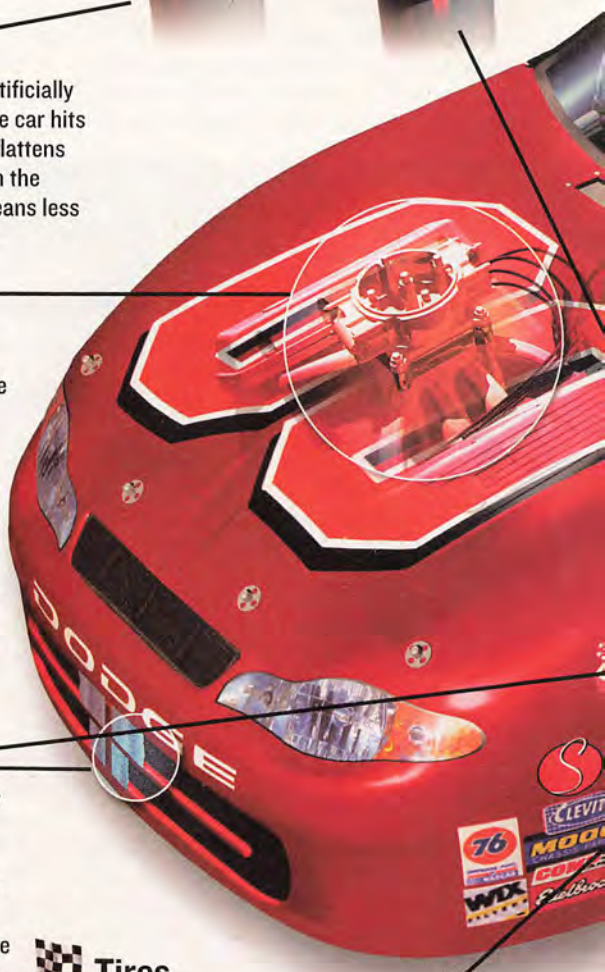
Only much later did I learn that at this speed the wall is liquid. At this speed you are deaf to everything but the greedy furnace blast of the engine, blind to anything but the tunnel you drill through the glare. At this speed time itself thins and cracks into useless theory. Your future—that impossible mirage of fame and adulation beyond fantasy, of privilege beyond measure, of houses and cars and those ice-cold millions uncountable—shimmers out there in that demon heat six inches ahead of you, and your past, that earthbound and dismal history, is nothing but a greasy breeze feathering into the stands 600 yards and a lifetime behind you. Drive fast enough and you hit life's escape velocity: dead or famous, and you're better off either way. So manage your fear, ride it, man, keep that oily churn in your gut buckled down tight. 'Cause if you don't, it might climb into your throat and choke you.

At this speed you are bared to the marrow, stripped of everything human except ambition and want—you become a pure, hard consciousness, without love or regret or identity. You are speed itself, simple acceleration, a rushing vector of infinite possibility. At this speed the track swims and unspools beneath you in a murderous blur. You are fast. Fast out of all proportion to sense or physics or the slow and tortured turning of the earth, you are centrifugal, orbital, as vast and ancient and celestial as something flung down from heaven to wreak a black and unblinking havoc on a thousand thousand generations of sinners. At this speed you are the very sword of God.

FASTER... AND FASTER

What does it take to win at Daytona? State-of-the-art technology and engineering and, in some cases, a willingness to bend a few rules*





Shocks
Use a thin piece of metal to artificially lengthen the shocks. When the car hits its first big bump, the spacer flattens out and the car sits lower than the mandated minimum, which means less resistance—and more speed.

Engine
A paradox: The technology is both state-of-the-art and obsolete. NASCAR engines use carburetors and distributors instead of fuel injectors and computers, but teams spend millions refining these archaic components. The lighter the better, but that means sacrificing sturdiness. In the words of one engineer, "The ideal engine will run 500 miles, cross the finish line and blow up."

Brakes
Similar to a standard car's but with much softer pads—they have to last only one race. Drivers are so hard on brakes that the brakes have to be cooled, by either removing tape that normally covers the front grille (increasing air flow but losing valuable downforce) or installing an air pump.

Tires
Wider than those on a standard car and without treads. Goodyear makes a specific tire for each track and different tires for the left and right sides since they bear different weight loads in a turn.

*legal cheating

Windshield
The same material used in bulletproof glass and fighter jet canopies. Shatterproof but scratches easily; crews cover it with sheets of hard, clear film that can be peeled off during pit stops to enhance visibility.

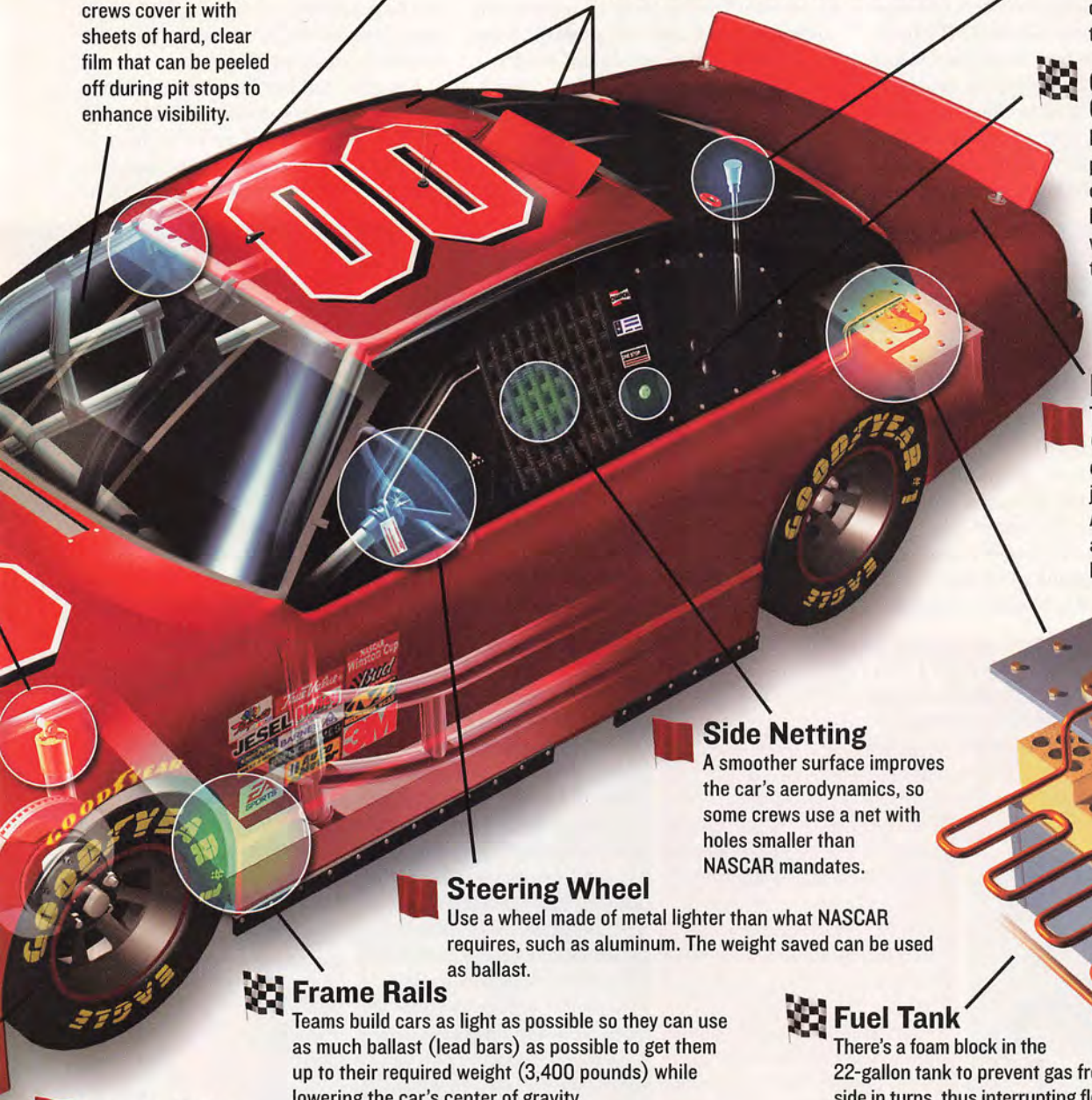
Roll Cage
Drill holes in the roll cage. The weight saved can then be added as ballast.

Roof Flaps and Shark Fins
A car takes on the aerodynamic properties of an airplane wing when it spins out and turns sideways. At that point roof flaps pop up to prevent lift, while shark fins on the rear window upset the airflow over the roof to make the car less prone to liftoff.

Jacking Screws
Attached to rear springs; can be adjusted during a race to change the car's weight distribution and, therefore, its handling.

Oil Heater Outlet
Before a race teams plug a generator into an outlet to power a heating element that warms the oil to its race temperature.

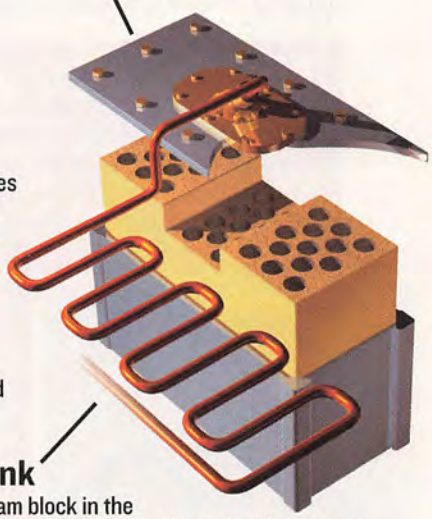
Rear Deck Lid
To get the spoiler lower (and thus produce less drag), install a hydraulic jack under the trunk lid. After inspection, activate the jack and lower the lid.



Side Netting
A smoother surface improves the car's aerodynamics, so some crews use a net with holes smaller than NASCAR mandates.

Steering Wheel
Use a wheel made of metal lighter than what NASCAR requires, such as aluminum. The weight saved can be used as ballast.

Frame Rails
Teams build cars as light as possible so they can use as much ballast (lead bars) as possible to get them up to their required weight (3,400 pounds) while lowering the car's center of gravity.



Fuel Tank
There's a foam block in the 22-gallon tank to prevent gas from sloshing to one side in turns, thus interrupting flow to the engine. This technology came from military helicopter research.

Frame Rails
Pour 25 pounds of BBs into the frame rails. Once the race starts, open up a trapdoor and dump the BBs—and all that weight—onto the track. Or put BBs or mercury in the rails; when the car turns, this weight shifts to the left side, making it easier to turn. On a straightaway the weight shifts back to the center.

Fuel
To get more gas in the car, cut holes in the tank's foam block or use an extra-long fuel line and snake it around the frame. Another cheap trick: Just dump in a can of STP.

ILLUSTRATION BY SLIM FILMS

At this speed you'll start Sunday's race 35th in a field of 43 cars. Or so it seems on any NASCAR qualifying day.

AT 27, Dale Earnhardt Jr., "Little E," currently embodies, metaphorically and otherwise, NASCAR's gleaming future. He is arguably the sport's first crossover star, a full-bore billboard MTV breakout bad boy (That hat! Those glasses! Rage rock! Hip-hop! Lock up your daughters, America!), running wide-effing-open down Madison Avenue, bringing beer and sass and sex into your shabby, joyless living room.

In years past the model for the great motoring heroes of the circuit was perhaps a little, um, straight-arrow. Scrubbed a bit too clean, bled out, colorless. The Other Other White Meat. In some cases there was a bit too much red, maybe, right around the neckbone. The muttonchops and nylon windbreakers don't peg the tach with those Greenwich focus groups. Preaching only to the converted, they sold motor oil, brake rotors and mentholated dippin' snuff.

Until the time of his father's death, Dale Jr., and to a lesser extent his brother Kerry, a successful Busch series driver, had inspired in fans only the kind of tentative, speculative affection that surrounds the son of any famous man. Sure, he'd won two championships in the Busch series, NASCAR's Triple A circuit, but did he have the grit, the steel, the mud, to run in the Show, the Winston Cup? He could drive, O.K., but the talk in the pits was that he had more *cojones* than cortex, and when was he gonna step, as they say, UP? Lordy, even Frank Sinatra Jr. can carry a tune. The only question is, how far?

Flung far and fast into the naked limelight by that slow-motion crash up the mountainous reach of Turn 4, Earnhardt Jr. might have become nothing more than a curiosity, another lounge act. Worse still, he

GENERATION RPM

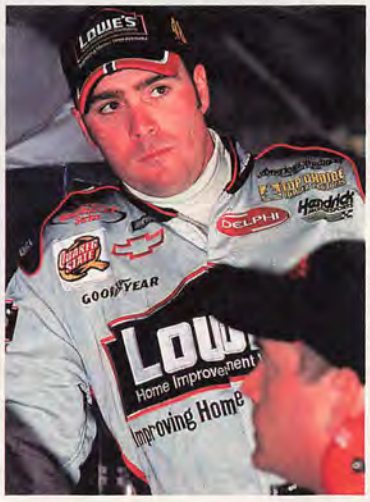
DALE EARNHARDT JR. isn't the only youngster out here breaking curfew, playing the stereo too loud and talking back to the grown-ups. This is the year of NASCAR's Children's Crusade, and rebellion, disrespect and poor posture are everywhere. According to the papers, avid young gunslingers are slouching into town by the trainload. Thanks to better race equipment and better data acquisition, better young crew chiefs and better national habits of dental hygiene, these drivers arrive in the Show faster, smarter, more competitive and better-looking than at any time in the sport's history. And they're giving the older folks fits. Veteran Rusty Wallace, NASCAR Rookie of the Year circa 1984, characterizes the 2002 Summer of Love like this: "They're outrunnin' the s--- out of us."

Kevin Harvick

In 2001 he won both the Busch series championship and the Winston Cup Rookie of the Year award. This year hasn't been so kind. Now 26, Harvick finds himself squarely in the clutches of an epic second-year slump, foundering in 32nd place in the points race with only two top 10 finishes. His car owner, Richard Childress, recently went so far as to swap Harvick's crew with teammate Robby Gordon's in an attempt to shake things up. Harvick's life, like that of most young men—in or out of a car—is rich with contradictions. Often charming, he is a talkative, funny, telegenic fan favorite. There's a very fine line between productive aggression and boorish territoriality, though, and Harvick sometimes garrotes himself with it. At Martinsville he so blatantly jackhammered Coy Gibbs out of his way in the Saturday truck race, and was so petulant when called to account for it, that NASCAR suspended him from the Sunday cup race. An education is an expensive thing.

Jimmie Johnson

With two wins and 10 top 10 finishes so far in his rookie season, Jimmie Johnson is the latest issue from NASCAR's platinum-plated V-8 phenom machine. Crazy fast and smooth as charlotte russe, he is fourth in points overall, has won three poles and has led more miles this year than anyone else. A native Californian who began racing in utero like his mentor and boss Jeff Gordon, he has a learning curve so steep you could rappel from it. But for a couple of novice mistakes, this former off-road wunderkind might have won three more races. Ten seconds one way or 10 feet another and Johnson could have won five races in the first half of his first year and become the hottest thing to hit American tracks since funnel cakes and binge drinking. As it is he'll have to settle for his current 72-point Helvetica incarnation as JIMMIE JOHNSON: SUPER ROOKIE! With a chance to shatter the modern record for first-year wins, he's the early shoo-in for Rookie of the Year. Sometimes referred to as the Kid, he'll be 27 in September.



DAVID WALBERG (LEFT); GEORGE TIEDEMANN/GT IMAGES

might have believed all those newspapers trimmed in mourning black that presented him, generously but wrongly, as JFK Jr.: a handsome, harmless attendant of the family's eternal flame, whose public life must be lived in the long, chilly shadow of his dead father and whose accomplishments can't help but seem small when seen in the wan, reflected light that infrequently falls on them.

So Dale Earnhardt Jr., grandson of short track legend Ralph Earnhardt and son of the mighty Intimidator, ol' Ironhead hisself, goes out and does the onliest thing he knows to trump the lame, melodramatic script that everyone else is trying to write for him. He races. He runs, as they say, good. Top 10. Top five. He wins. At Daytona in July. At Dover. At Talladega. He finishes 2001 eighth in points and with $5.8 million in winnings. On top of that he makes monster endorsement money, and the fans' affections, their swarming passions, untethered after his father's accident, are beginning now to bear down on him.

Which brings us back to the *Day of the Locust* crowds that attend his every move. It starts during those two long weeks in Daytona, 2002. The book's a hit. He's everywhere on television. He can't walk anywhere without being pestered, pictured, pursued. If he stops long enough to take a breath, a bouquet of microphones materializes in front of him. He has to hide in the garage or strap himself into his car. He runs good the first few weeks. Top 10. Top five. During any given race he has more women sitting on his toolbox in the pits than most other drivers, a sure sign of, well, something. At Texas in early April he spins and wads the car up pretty good in Turn 2, and security tries to close the garage because so many fans come pouring over the fences to watch his crew try to bang the frame straight. His failures now attract greater attention than some drivers get in Victory Lane.

Kurt Busch

Currently ninth in the points standings, Kurt Busch is a 23-year-old NASCAR sophomore from Las Vegas whose hobbies include waterskiing, baseball and taking the air off Jimmy Spencer's rear spoiler. The slender Busch played the entire drum break from *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida* on Spencer's ample quarter panels on the way to winning his first race, at Bristol, in March. While Busch was climbing out his window at the start-finish line to wave at his fans like a 750-horsepower prom king, the 45-year-old Spencer was saying, ominously and in the first-person plural reserved for acts of Machiavellian revenge, "We never forget. . . . " Which is good, because Busch will probably be around for a long time. He is earnest, enthusiastic and is perhaps a better interview than he really wants to be. Busch got himself in trouble a few weeks ago when he almost proudly hinted at spinning Robbie Gordon at Charlotte just to bring out a yellow flag. He retrenched a few days later and explained, vaguely, that he had simply been misunderstood, but by then the damage was done, and he'd been hit with a week of detention by the NASCAR vice principal. On the upside, though, when asked after a crash in practice at Dover whether he'd been hurt, he said no, of course not, "I mean, it's the Rubbermaid car, right?" Imagine a choirboy with a stiletto in his sock.

Matt Kenseth

Though three wins and six top five finishes in 2002 put Matt Kenseth eighth overall in points, a birth date of 3/10/72 seems to have him teetering on the slippery brink of geezerhood. How fleeting Time's sweet promise! Was it just 19 months ago, back when all the world seemed green and filled with music, that this low-key Wisconsin native was awarded his Rookie of the Year trophy? In his second season he suffered what those who fret such things call a sophomore slump, winning no races and only $2,565,579 to invest against his rapidly looming Sunset Years. On the track he races a deceptively quick, efficient line that leaves you wondering, as he glides into Victory Lane, how the heck he got there. His own father refers to him, quite accurately, as "the quiet assassin." Off the track Kenseth dotes on his wife and his son and Lars, a ginger cat named for the drummer of the band Metallica—incontrovertible evidence of his advancing age.

Ryan Newman

A quiet, sometimes dour-seeming Hoosier with a magnificent smile and a B.S. degree in vehicle structure engineering from Purdue University, rookie Ryan Newman has played the stoical nice-guy sidekick to Johnson's meteoric golden boy this year. At 5′ 10″ and 207 pounds he gives the impression of fireplug immobility, but behind the wheel he is a brute Nijinsky. When asked for the best piece of advice he's received so far in his brief career, Newman, 24, a member of the Quarter-Midget Hall of Fame, replies softly, "Just keep the fenders on it." Apparently the fenders of others are not always to be held in the same esteem. Not afraid to reengineer competitors' cars during a rush to the front, he won the big money all-star race at Charlotte after hip-checking Elliott Sadler. Newman helped Kurt Busch perform high-speed structural modifications at Pocono and extended further generosities to an ungrateful Steve Park at Dover on Lap 125. —J.M.

GEORGE TIEDEMANN/GT IMAGES (BUSCH); OLYA T. EVANITSKY (2)

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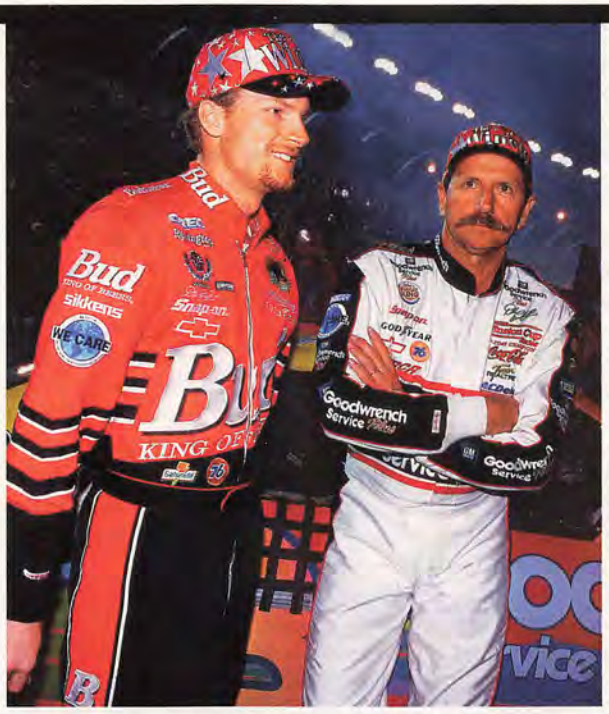

FATHER FIGURE The bitter irony for Dale Jr. is that the death of his dad (right) paved the way for his breakout success.

At Bristol, in the surprising early-season cold of the Tennessee hills, he shows up in his pit thuggin' it, dressed like P. Diddy at Gstaad, with a knit cap pulled down to his evil shades and a mustard ski jacket the size of a spinnaker. The crowd of 147,000 pours ovations down on him in that tiny, tidy bowl. The loudest of the day comes right after the race, however, when he and Robby Gordon bang each other hard going back into pit road. It is intentional and juvenile, and it will cost them both thousands of dollars in fines. But it is also old-school, Friday-night, dirt-track turf-war gamesmanship. The people roar for it, for him. In the motoring press a week later are the recriminatory editorials about sophomoric behavior and dark murmurs about a missed promotional appearance. Drowned out by the cheering, they go unheeded.

At Talladega back in April, under that angry Alabama mother sun, the fans rose in the stands every time Dale Jr. ran his car out for practice. In the shade of the garage between sessions he would peel himself out of the top of his driver's suit, hitch his pants and stand, flushed and frail-seeming, in front of the swamp cooler by the car. Yahooing cries of "Junior!" rang out during the prayer before the race, a 40-year-old echo of the days when Junior Johnson was the Last American Hero. When the race began, so did the roaring, from a grandstand nearly a mile long, louder even than the cars. Every time he ran out front the roar grew and people stood and people fainted in the heat and the roar swelled again and became a solid wall of noise for the last few laps and the people swooned in the light and the noise and the hot, heroic love of something they felt was bigger than all of them. And he won. At the moment he crossed the finish line, borne forward by the apocalyptic cry of 200,000 fans, scores of thousands of cameras flashed, impossibly cold and blue, the moment frozen.

Dale Jr. is arguably the sport's first crossover star, a full-bore MTV breakout bad boy, running wide-effing-open down Madison Avenue.

WHY IS NASCAR so successful? In part, I think, because unlike most other sports, in which fans can see only dim reflections of themselves—when was the last time you hit a 450-foot home run off a 98-mile-an-hour fastball, or carded a 63 at Medinah, or tomahawked some stank down on Shaq's head?—NASCAR is at once death-defying and prosaic. When was the last time you drove?

NASCAR works overtime to engage its fans in many ways. Foremost among these, obviously, is the racing itself, with its manufacturer rivalries, its life-or-death risks and rewards and its stars trading paint and sharp words at speed on the high-banked ovals at Darlington or Martinsville.

NASCAR is also one of the strictest, albeit one of the most fluid, rule-making bodies in sport. The organization's nabobs intend for mechanical parity to ensure close racing and further fan interest, so they not only micromanage the engineering of the race cars at every point but also often modify the construction rules from week to week or even day to day, half an inch here, half a pound there, to prevent one make or model from gaining an unfair advantage over the others. The teams, of course, do everything they can to gain that unfair advantage, so the tension between enforcement and violation of the many technical restrictions creates a kind of nervous equilibrium. Outright cheating is now rare, but elaborate conspiracy theories still fuel the garage rumor mill. Though the cars still look vaguely like sedans you might see at a dealership, they are, in fact, 780-horsepower purpose-built thoroughbreds. NASCAR is so successful in calibrating their equality that the average margin of victory in the 2001 season, across 10 months and nearly 40 races, was a little more than a single second.

And NASCAR, unlike sports without a central governing authority, makes sure fans have unprecedented access to the athletes—that family autograph opportunities are plentiful at every racetrack and at the many personal appearances the drivers routinely make. Like the music business down in Nashville with its annual FanFest, NASCAR enforces a grassroots interaction between its stars and the paying customers. At a time when NFL players are nothing more to most autograph seekers than an angry silhouette behind the tinted glass of a giant SUV fleeing the stadium parking lot, NASCAR understands the responsibilities of mythmaking and corporate endorsement and touts its heroes as good ol' boys from right next door who will sign just about

GEORGE TIEDEMANN/GT IMAGES

anything you hand them and would love to hunker down with a bottle of Bud and some nachos if they only had the time.

In the interest of customizing this myth-making, NASCAR manufactures matinee idols of several stripes, from the young, square-jawed All-America hotshots like Jeff Gordon and Jimmie Johnson and Tony Stewart to the avuncular, deep-fried elders like Dale Jarrett, Mark Martin and Rusty Wallace. And once a driver earns himself a regular ride in the Show, he'll find that he's got a prefab, presold fan base and a gleaming merchandise hauler on the racetrack midway hawking his now-heroic headshot on hats and shirts and jackets.

All this is far more than a redneck cult of personality, however. NASCAR has, for its fans from Manhattan to Manhattan Beach, transcended its self-limiting Southern origins. Instead it has institutionalized Southern hospitality and charm. Even the television announcers are unrelentingly sunny and upbeat.

"It can't be good when the car starts burnin' that way, can it, Darrell?"

"No, sir, not even one little bit!"

Fans are also taught to cheer the teams and car owners for whom their idols race and to follow even the performance of their pit crews with an abiding passion. (There are televised competitions now among the crews. Gold medal fill-ups! World-class tire changes! The base, animal thrill of windshields wiped squeaky clean!) And, as in no other sport, fans applaud the equipment, too, devoting themselves, sometimes for life, to the cars, either Ford or Chevy, Pontiac or Dodge, driving one brand to the exclusion of all others, a loyalty manufacturers have been exploiting since stock car racing began in earnest after World War II. "Win on Sunday, sell on Monday" is as true now as it was when the hottest ride on the track was a Hudson Hornet.

Eight weeks ago 100,000 fans washed over Fontana, Calif., over the track and the stands and the garages, running and pooling everywhere, lapping gently against the fences and the walls and the cars and the drivers. On a Saturday afternoon Dale Earnhardt Jr. watches this tide flow quietly around him from the upholstered anonymity of his immense motor home.

Even stretched to full length on the sofa, watching yet another race on TV with his buds, he seems restless and animated. He shifts his weight, sits up, reclines again, energetic but relaxed, ready for something—the race tomorrow, maybe. Jeans, shirt, cap. Chin whiskers this week. He looks you straight in the eye when he listens and when he speaks. He can dial the North Carolina in his voice up or down, but it's nothing you could dip a biscuit in. He looks stronger, more substantial, away from the car. He is handsome, certainly, but he is not the looming Apollo his billboards portray. He looks more like the lube 'n' tune guy he used to be at Dale Earnhardt Chevrolet than the object of national obsession he's become. In the right light he looks like a guy who looks just like the guy on the billboard.

"Two years ago, when I'd walk from my motorcoach to the car in practice, there were less than half the people asking for autographs, so I see that there's a big change as far as the hard-core fans that we have now. It's changed quite a bit. There's a responsibility that goes with it now. A lot of the fans say, 'Man, we like you because you're yourself—stay yourself, always be yourself.' And that's true to a point, but I'm finding now, more and more, that we're under the microscope, that some of the things I would do in the past aren't accepted now. Something that was just a prick on the rosebush before is a huge problem now, something I might say in an interview or something. It's taken quite a lot more seriously now." And he's right. His every remark is broadcast, typeset, satellited, sent resonating down that clacking NASCAR telegraph. Whom does he date? How many beers does he drink? What's his favorite band? An encyclopedia of banalities. Try as he might to unplug himself, he can't.

NASCAR touts its heroes as good ol' boys from right next door who'd love to hunker down with a Bud and nachos if they only had the time.

On his way out the door for yet another interview he is confronted by thousands of reminders of his father—portraits, banners, flags snapping in the breeze. "I used to miss him every minute," he says. "Now I've got it down to about every five minutes." Then he's gone.

On the 228th lap at Fontana, Kevin Harvick cuts a tire coming through Turn 4 and swerves dead left into the right rear quarter panel of the devil-red number 8. Betrayed by a sudden absence of traction and Sir Isaac Newton's buzz-killer humbug on the subjects of mass and force and momentum, Dale Earnhardt Jr. is launched uphill into the wall. Spinning, he hits first front then rear, hard; hard enough to accordion the car down to about two thirds of its original length; hard enough to bring an audible gasp from the frontstretch grandstand; hard enough even to silence the TV announcers, if only briefly. The car slides down onto the grass, vomiting steam and smoke and oil, and sits ominously, heavily there for what seems like a long time. This is by far the worst hit of his career. In less than 30 seconds, though, the EMTs have him out of the car. Bent double, grimacing, he has had the wind knocked out of him.

Twenty minutes later he comes swinging out the doors of the infield medical center on crutches. He sprained an ankle when he braced his feet against the firewall. Torqued a shoulder joint, too, and the russet bloom of his bruises is just beginning. Nothing serious. He is pissed off and joking, but mostly pissed off, and his one grumbled comment, "I hit hard, goddammit, you know the rest," will no doubt have to be translated into uplifting, PG-rated sports jabber for the morning papers.

Fans throng the fence line as Earnhardt is driven away on a golf cart, applauding, whistling, bellowing encouragement. One man, though, remains still. He is a round little handful of a man, maybe 40 or so, and he holds above the fence, at stubby arm's length, a large mirror framed in rococo gilt.

It's the kind of thing you'd see in a sports bar or an overdone rumpus room. Across its bright face in lurid Victorian gold and red stencil it reads BUDWEISER CONGRATULATES DALE EARNHARDT JR. He holds it as high as he can, dazzling in the sun, until Junior is gone. Before anyone can ask why he's brought it here, he, too, slips away. Whatever did he expect Dale Earnhardt Jr., or any one of us, to see in it?

FROM A SPORT whose origins are rooted in the misty hills and hollers of the postwar rural South, where the white-lightning ridge runners boomed through the moonless night trying to outrun the po-leece and the gubmint revenuers, NASCAR has evolved into the new model for the synergies of cutting-edge, multiplatform, cross-promotional corporate performance. And Dale Earnhardt Jr., whose fame is now self-sustaining and whose career arc will become the responsibility largely of strangers, who is the Next American Hero or the new Eddie Haskell, depending on who does the telling, will be asked, like it or not, to carry it all forward on his perfectly average, 40-regular shoulders.

At Richmond, the first weekend of May, he crashes unremarkably and limps out of that rain-swollen weekend 12th in points for the season. Two weeks later he electrifies the crowd at Charlotte with a late-night, last-lap charge to the front in the Winston, NASCAR's cannily formatted All-Star street fight. By choosing not to punt eventual winner Ryan Newman out of his way with two turns left in the race, Earnhardt Jr. forfeits around $750K but earns the manic affection of the motoring press and several hundred 24-karat column inches on the topics of probity, maturity and good sportsmanship. "Getting to him was easy," says Junior at the media center just before midnight, "getting by him was something different."

"He made a helluva run!" the fans boom from car to car, still waiting at 1 a.m. for the traffic to thin, "one helluva run."

"His old man'da crashed 'im," the state cop says, arms windmilling, uselessly indicating the distant exits.

A week later he runs well until he gets tangled up with a slower car and brushes the wall. The car goes sour; then it overheats and goes away entirely, and he finishes deep in the field at the Coca-Cola 600. At Dover, Del., he finishes 30th and drops to 14th in the points race. At Pocono he's 12th. At Michigan, 22nd. At Sonoma, 30th. Everywhere they scream for him as the season inches on.

His future, whatever it may be, will draft a survey of the entire NASCAR landscape, across which roll and intersect not only the easy streams of popular culture, in which we find the commonplace objects of our desire—cars and money and fame—but also the wide, hard ribbons of American religion and race and class. NASCAR distills to an essence America's obsession with speed and sex and death. In it beats the heart of our national experience as citizen consumers and hell-bent rebel yellers. In it lies our central postmodern metaphor: racing ever faster in circles, chasing a buck. In it we fire and forge our next generation of American Heroes. In it we rediscover our restless frontier habits, our deep rural need to move fast across the land, fleeing the oppression of boredom, pursuing a different sun gone down on a new horizon and finding at the end of that day peace or satisfaction or perhaps only, ever, always, ourselves. □

For Winston Cup results, standings and news, plus a weekly diary from Jimmie Johnson, go to cnnsi.com/motorsports.

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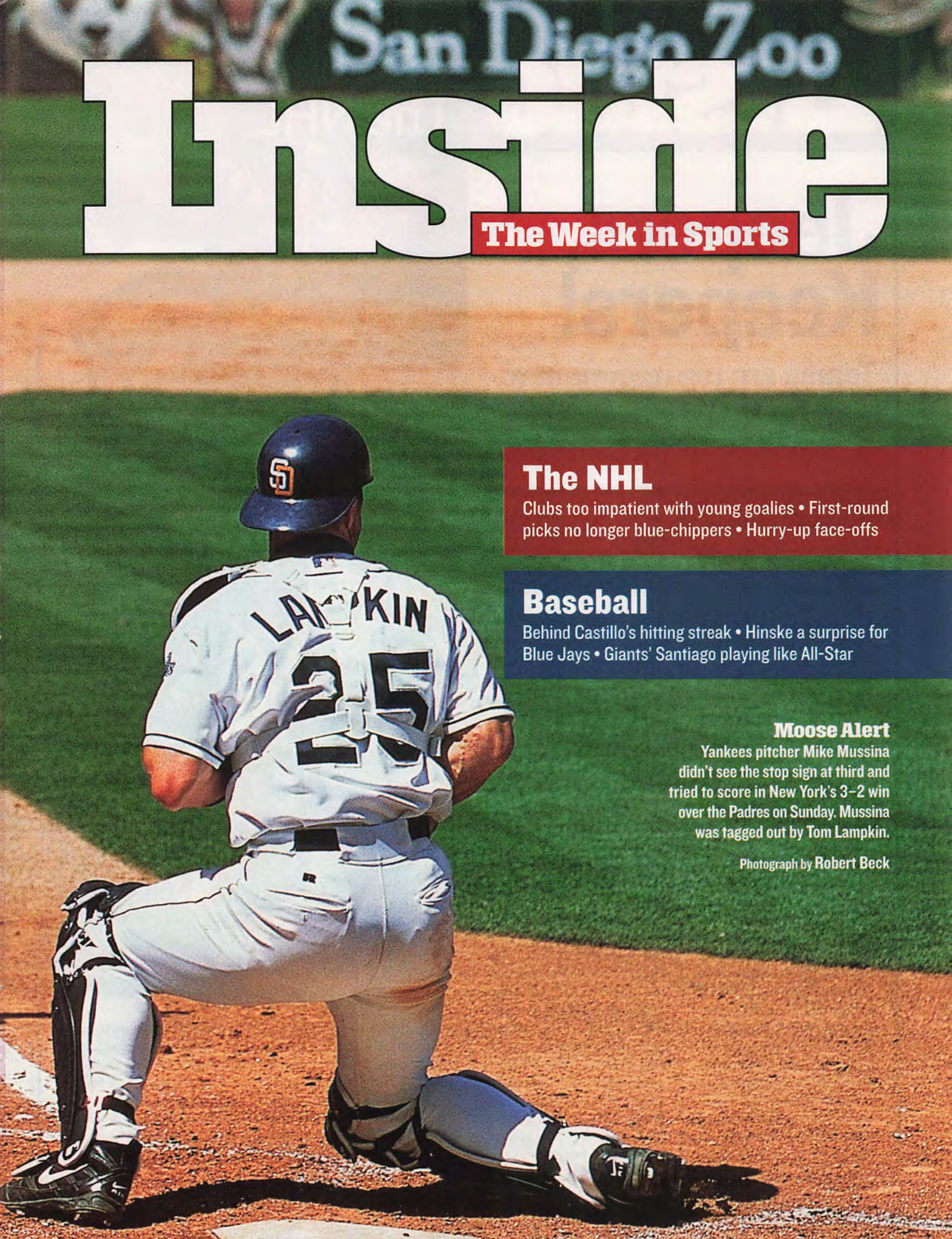
The Week in Sports



The NHL

Clubs too impatient with young goalies • First-round picks no longer blue-chippers • Hurry-up face-offs

Baseball

Behind Castillo's hitting streak • Hinske a surprise for Blue Jays • Giants' Santiago playing like All-Star

Moose Alert

Yankees pitcher Mike Mussina didn't see the stop sign at third and tried to score in New York's 3–2 win over the Padres on Sunday. Mussina was tagged out by Tom Lampkin.

Photograph by Robert Beck

Jeepers, Keepers!

Teams are too impatient to wait for their first-round goaltending picks to develop

by Daniel G. Habib

MOMENTS AFTER the Thrashers selected him with the second pick in last Saturday's draft, Kari Lehtonen, an 18-year-old goaltender for Jokerit Helsinki in Finland's Division 1, was asked to evaluate his chances of cracking Atlanta's roster next fall. "I think I have a chance," Lehtonen said. "That's my goal, to play next year in the NHL." Rosy views of the future are de rigueur for high draftees. However, if history is a guide, not only will Lehtonen not become an NHL regular next season, but he also won't be with the Thrashers when (and if) he ever does.

Even as netminders' draft-day prominence has increased recently—over the last six drafts four times goalies have been among the first six selections; the only other time a goalie had been picked that high was in 1983—the likelihood of a keeper's standing in the crease for the club that chose him has declined. The combination of a goalie's lengthy developmental process and teams' win-now approach has made homegrown netminders rare. Last season only seven of the league's 32 starters (two teams had goalies share the No. 1 job) had been a regular with the club that drafted them, and goalies playing for their draft teams accounted for just 29% of all minutes in net.

"If you don't come around fast, general managers grow impatient because they're not sure if they're going to be around themselves," says Canucks G.M. Brian Burke, whose four goalies last season—Dan Cloutier, Peter Skudra, Alexander Auld and Martin Brochu—were acquired from other teams. "It becomes, 'We've got to win today.' Everybody talks about rebuilding and giving guys a chance, but most teams [don't have the time] to rebuild."

Because the NHL readiness of keepers depends largely on technical mastery, their development is slow. Raw attributes such as size and speed, which can provide shortcuts for position players, aren't as helpful to netminders, who need exposure to different shots and shooters and to work with pro goalie coaches. What's more, because players are rarely eligible to join NHL-affiliated minor league teams until they're 20, the two years following the draft are usually spent in junior leagues, where honing keepers' skills is not a priority.

Lehtonen was drafted No. 2 by Atlanta, but will he ever be a Thrashers regular?

The average age at which last season's NHL starters in goal became regular roster members (that is, played at least 25 games in a season) was 23 years, eight months. Typically, only teams that already possess goaltending depth can wait those five-plus years for a netminder to mature. If Atlanta can wait, the highly touted Lehtonen may evolve into an All-Star, but circumstances could force the Thrashers (19-47-11-5 last season) to move their prize. As with many teams trying to develop goalies, time isn't on their side.

J. KOLIS/B. BENNETT STUDIOS

First-Round Draft Picks

Not Even a 50-50 Proposition

Team executives are downplaying the importance of a first-round draft choice—"The value of a pick has gone the way of the stock market," says Islanders G.M. Mike Milbury—and not without justification. Even given at least a five-year window for development, recent first-round picks have more often than not failed to become NHL regulars (by our definition, position players who appeared in 65 games last season and goalies who were in 25), let alone stars. Of the 154 first-round picks from 1992 through '97, just 71, or 46.1%, were regulars in 2001–02.

Hurry-up Face-off Rule

Good Fourth Line More Important

The league's decision last Thursday to institute hurry-up face-offs, similar to those used at the Salt Lake City Olympics, was made to decrease the length of games and pick up the flow of action. Under the new protocol, dead time during stoppages (save for the final two minutes of regulation and overtime) will last no longer than 18 seconds—five seconds for the visiting team to change lines, eight for the home team to change and five for the linesman to drop the puck—which should shorten matches by eight to 14 minutes.

Until now no time limit had been imposed. Henceforth, stoppage time will be kept by linesmen, who have been instructed to drop the puck after 18 seconds whether both teams are ready for the face-off or not.

The modified procedure will have another effect on the game: It will benefit deeper, more talented teams, because it places a premium on having four solid lines. With face-off downtime curtailed, the stalling tactics that allow precious moments for a club's top lines to rest will be eliminated. A middling team with only three good lines won't be able to hide its fourth unit. Upper-echelon clubs will capitalize on the mismatch generated by their superior talent, an advantage that is often more pronounced at the bottom of the depth chart.

"I don't think our games are too long, but if we can reduce the length of stoppages, that's a plus for the flow of the game," commissioner Gary Bettman said last week. The plus for flow may be a minus for competitive balance. Still, the hurry-up face-off is an idea whose time has come.

Unrestricted Free Agents

Top Buys for Bargain Hunters

Free agency begins on July 1, but not every team comes to the marketplace with the money to sign prime Group III players such as Maple Leafs goalie Curtis Joseph, who is expected to get a contract worth at least $36 million over four years. For cost-conscious clubs, here are three second-tier unrestricted free agents who can provide immediate help.

• D Luke Richardson, Flyers. This big bruiser (6' 4", 210 pounds) is a model of consistency: single-digit points and triple-digit penalty minutes in each of the last five seasons. Still, the 33-year-old would be a top four defenseman on many teams.

• D Bret Hedican, Hurricanes. This speedy 31-year-old showed valuable versatility during Carolina's surprise run to the Cup finals. He played opposite Aaron Ward on the No. 2 defensive pairing, killed penalties and quarterbacked the power play.

• RW Scott Young, Blues. He's coming off a down year (19 goals and 22 assists), but the well-traveled 34-year-old has won two Stanley Cups (Penguins in 1991, Avalanche in '96) and was a 40-goal scorer two seasons ago.□

COURTESY OF NHL (LEFT); COURTESY OF MLB

in the Crease

by Pierre McGuire

Coyotes managing partner **Wayne Gretzky** was impressed with highly touted center **Jeff Taffe**'s first on-ice workout with Phoenix two weeks ago. The reason? Taffe, a first-round pick in 2000 who played for the Minnesota Golden Gophers last season, refused to wear a visor, as he was required to in college. Gretzky, an old-school type, thinks that Taffe, whom he expects to be a regular in 2002–03, proved his willingness to play the game as tough as necessary. . . . The NHL's award voting needs to be changed in light of last Thursday's results. How could the Professional Hockey Writers' Association (PHWA) honor the Canadiens' **José Théodore** with the Hart Trophy yet name **Patrick Roy** the first-team All-Star goalie? The same writers don't necessarily cast votes for both the awards and the All-Star teams. . . . The Red Wings think they landed a draft gem when they chose 5' 9", 178-pound Czech center **Jiri Hudler** with their first pick (58th overall) last Saturday. Hudler, who was nicknamed Shrimp by many NHL scouts, was ranked 15th on Detroit's draft list. Thanks to European scout **Hakan Andersson**, the Red Wings have found good talent late in the draft with players such as forwards **Tomas Holmstrom** (257th pick in '94) and **Pavel Datsyuk** (171st in '98). . . . At last week's meeting of the NHL Coaches' Association, several members voiced concern about the **increasing incidence of obstruction**. Among the association's recommendations, which would need approval by the NHL board of governors, is to more clearly define what constitutes obstruction, making it easier for officials to call.

Which Team Would You Rather Own?

Buffalo Sabres

Under the control of the NHL since last week, after owner John Rigas's mismanagement drove the team about $150 million into debt, the fan-rich, talent-poor club is looking for a local buyer to keep it in town.

Montreal Expos

Under the control of Major League Baseball since last winter, when former owner Jeffrey Loria was given a $120 million bailout, the talent-rich, fan-poor team is hoping it doesn't become a victim of contraction.

THE VERDICT: Give us Vladimir Guerrero, Jose Vidro and a fleet of moving vans bound for warmer climes. The Expos are our pick.—D.G.H.

His streak over, Castillo was consoled by Torborg and a dramatic Marlins win last Saturday.

COLIN BRALEY/REUTERS

The Spirit Of 56

Joe DiMaggio's record lives on as speedy Luis Castillo runs out of scratch hits

by Michael Bamberger

OLD BASEBALL records have fallen in recent years, but the king of them all—Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak, set in 1941—survives. Last Saturday talk of Marlins second baseman Luis Castillo's surpassing DiMaggio filled the home clubhouse at Pro Player Stadium. The Marlins were optimistic because the 26-year-old Dominican, a speedy, slap hitter, always seems to find a way to get on base. A switch-hitter who covers the 90 feet from home to first in 3.7 seconds when batting lefthanded, Castillo already had 28 infield singles this year, including 18 since his hitting streak started on May 8.

His first hit last Friday night against the Tigers, which extended his streak to 35 games, came on an infield single in the bottom of the third. After reaching third base two batters later, Castillo said in Spanish to Marlins coach Ozzie Guillen, "My God, I've got to do this s--- again tomorrow night."

Or at least he'd try. On Saturday night Castillo was hitless in his first three at bats. Then he came up in the eighth with his team trailing Detroit 4–1. Castillo made the sign of the cross twice, stepped in lefthanded and grounded out to short. The streak, it seemed, was over. Most of the 14,713 fans stood and applauded his accomplishment. Castillo returned to the dugout and sat on the floor for a moment, his head between his knees. Then he popped up for a curtain call, raising a fist in the muggy South Florida air.

But in the bottom of the ninth four of the Marlins' first five batters reached base, and soon the game was tied at four with a runner, Andy Fox, on third. Coming to the plate with one out was pinch hitter Tim Raines, and Castillo was on deck.

"Do you want me to bunt?" Raines asked Marlins manager Jeff Torborg.

"No," Torborg said.

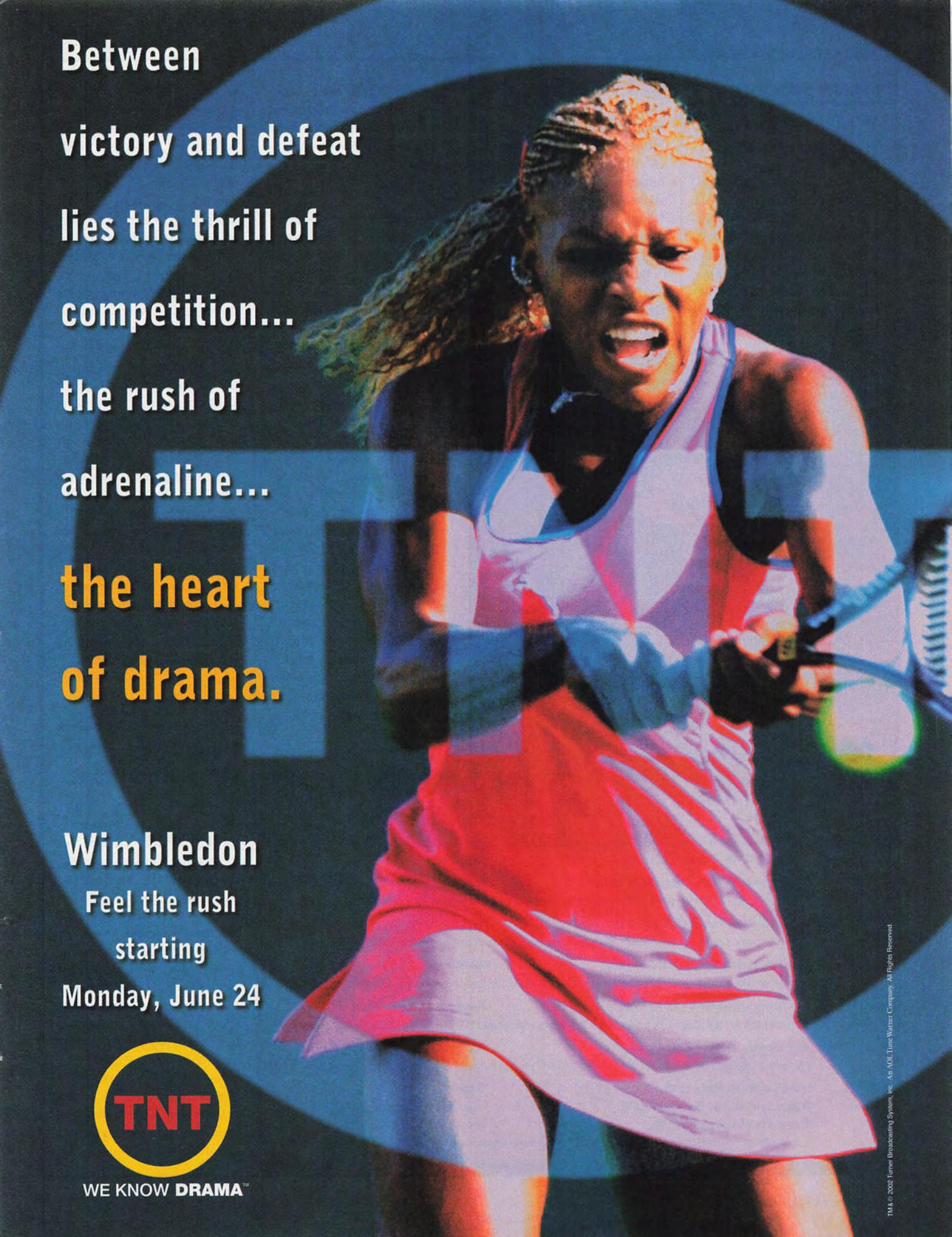
"But what about. . . ."

"I don't care," Torborg said, loud enough to be heard in the stands. "Win the game."

Raines hit a fly ball to shallow center, but it was deep enough to score Fox with the winning run. It was a thrilling victory for Florida, which won its fifth straight and moved within 5½ games of the front-running Braves in the National League East. As his teammates celebrated at home plate, Castillo stood in the on-deck circle, just as the Brewers' Paul Molitor did when his 39-game hitting streak ended in 1987.

In Castillo's face you could see nothing. Not happiness, not disappointment, not relief. "I was glad we won," he said afterward, "but I wanted to bat again." Castillo hit .403 during the streak, raising his average to .341.

Though he had the longest hitting streak in 15 years and tied for the 10th longest in history, Castillo still finished 21 games short of DiMaggio's record. He made it almost two thirds of the way. "Fifty-six remains astronomical," says DiMaggio's lone surviving brother, Dom, who had a 34-game hitting streak himself while playing for the Red Sox in 1949. "These days they write up eight-game hitting streaks. For this young man to get to 35, that's pretty darn good. Fifty-six might be the one record that doesn't ever get broken."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Lesson on Hitting Streaks

Why Castillo Kept It Going

Luis Castillo is no magna cum laude when it comes to baseball history. He once mistook Stan Musial for Lou Brock and had never heard of Rogers Hornsby until last week. But he put himself in elite company when he became only the 25th player to extend a hitting streak past 30 games. It's been done 27 times (twice by Ty Cobb and George Sisler). How rare is that? More hitters have had 50-homer or 150-RBI seasons than 35-game hitting streaks. Three-hundred-strikeout seasons or 16-game winning streaks by pitchers are more common than 35-game hitting streaks.

Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams, Barry Bonds, Tony Gwynn and Wade Boggs are just a few of the many great hitters never to have a 30-game streak. Based on those who streaked before him, Castillo had the right profile to join the 24 other players who have taken hitting streaks beyond 30 games. Here is what it takes.

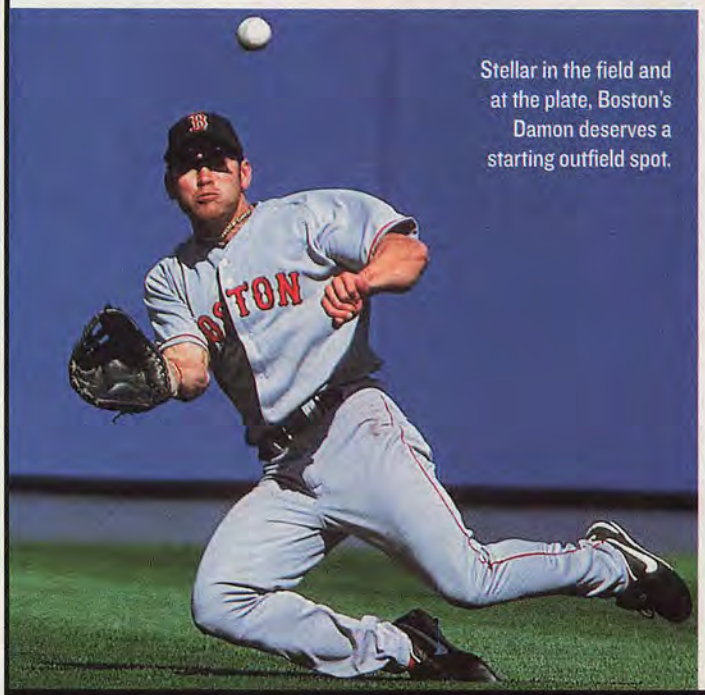
• Speed. All 24 players who came before Castillo had above average speed except outfielder Rico Carty (1970) and first baseman George McQuinn (1938). Even 37-year-old Pete Rose still had good speed when he hit in 44 straight games in 1978. Castillo, who led the majors with 62 stolen bases in 2000, is among the fastest players in baseball and a threat to bunt for singles.

• Consistent contact. Hitters with big strikeout totals don't show up on the list, except for Benito Santiago, who whiffed 112 times as a rookie with the Padres in 1987, the year in which he had a 34-game streak. Nobody else on the list struck out more than 67 times in the year of their streak. Castillo is a slash-and-run hitter who may be another exception; he was on pace to strike out 88 times this year. He struck out 16 times during his 35-game streak—more than DiMaggio did over the entire 1941 season (13).

• Avoid walks. The key is to get as many at bats as possible and put the ball in play. A hitting streak is the one time when a walk is not as good as a hit. Castillo walked eight times during the 35-game streak and is on pace for 55 this season, which falls in the typical range for players on the list. DiMaggio walked 21 times during his streak and 76 times for the season. (Interestingly, Detroit manager Luis Pujols said on Sunday that he would have ordered a walk to Castillo if he had come to the plate with the game tied 4–4 in the ninth last Saturday.)

• Hitting pedigree. We're talking good hitters. Fly-by-night guys don't hit in 35 straight games. Only two players who did so failed to finish the season hitting .300: Hal Chase hit .287 in 1907, and Ken Landreaux hit .281 in '80. Indeed, of the 22 retired players with hitting streaks of more than 30 games, 18 of them finished with a lifetime batting average of .290 or better. Castillo began this year with a .282 career average. If history means anything, that average is likely to get higher.

—Tom Verducci



Stellar in the field and at the plate, Boston's Damon deserves a starting outfield spot.

SI's All-Star Ballot

With the midsummer classic on tap for July 9, here are the American League leaders in fan voting and our corresponding choices (stats through Sunday).

POSITION	VOTE LEADER (AS OF JUNE 18)	SI CHOICE
First base	**Jason Giambi, Yankees (.309, 19 HR, 59 RBIs)**	**Paul Konerko, White Sox (.325, 16, 62)**
	Giambi is having a terrific year, but Konerko gets the nod because he's done more with less	
Second base	**Alfonso Soriano, Yankees (.323, 17, 44)**	**Soriano**
	With his power, speed and athleticism, Soriano is the league's most exciting player east of Ichiro	
Third base	**Shea Hillenbrand, Red Sox (.315, 13, 49)**	**Hillenbrand**
	Much improved second-year man deserves spot over Yankees' Robin Ventura and budding A's star Eric Chavez	
Shortstop	**Alex Rodriguez, Rangers (.294, 21, 60)**	**Rodriguez**
	Toughest call on ballot, but as league leader in homers and second in RBIs, A-Rod edges Nomar Garciaparra	
Catcher	**Jorge Posada, Yankees (.262, 10, 43)**	**A.J. Pierzynski, Twins (.325, 4, 27)**
	Pierzynski's average is tops among AL catchers, plus he's nailed more runners attempting to steal than Posada	
Outfield	**Ichiro Suzuki, Mariners (.365, 1, 27)**	**Suzuki**
	Manny Ramirez, Red Sox (.372, 9, 35)	**Johnny Damon, Red Sox (.322, 5, 34)**
	Torii Hunter, Twins (.298, 17, 53)	**Hunter**
	Leading league with 59 runs, Damon deserves the spot over Ramirez, who was injured	

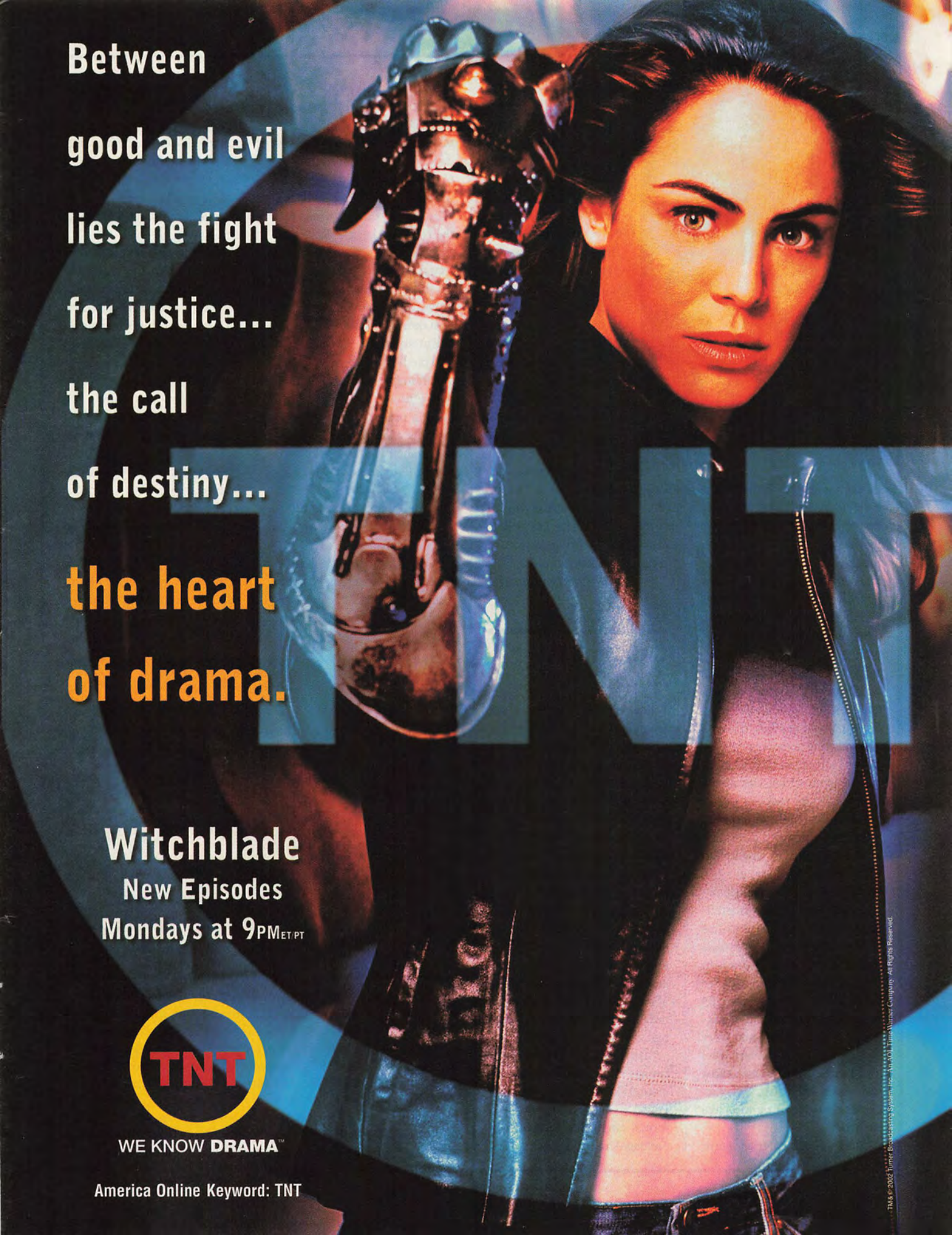
Toronto Rookie Eric Hinske

Rebuilding Jays' Hot Cornerstone

When the season began, Toronto's Eric Hinske was low on the list of rookie third basemen trying to break into a major league lineup. Sean Burroughs of the Padres and Hank Blalock of the Rangers were projected as the next big stars at the position; even Morgan Ensberg of the Astros got more hype. Hinske, 24, was just another prospect looking for a chance to play every day on a rebuilding team. "No one really knew about him," says Blue Jays general manager J.P. Ricciardi. "Not that we minded. We didn't want to put all that pressure on him."

Burroughs, Blalock and Ensberg wilted under the spotlight, and all three were gone from the

AL TIELEMANS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Hinske has killed the ball—and the occasional bat—in a bid for Rookie of the Year honors.

majors by the end of May. Hinske, meanwhile, is putting together one of the most productive rookie seasons in Toronto history. Through Sunday he was hitting .286 and leading all AL rookies with 13 home runs and 40 RBIs. With 33 extra-base hits he was on his way to breaking the franchise rookie record of 50 set by Shawn Green in 1995. Hinske's .538 slugging percentage was 29 points better than Green's mark that season, which was also a team record for rookies.

Hinske's development may have been enhanced by his relative anonymity as he climbed through the minors, getting more seasoning than many blue-chip prospects do. He was drafted in the 17th round by the Cubs in 1998 and played 2½ seasons in their system before a trade to the A's led to a breakout year in 2001. He batted .282 with 25 homers and 79 RBIs for Oakland's Triple A Sacramento River Cats. "He played at every level and honed his craft the right way, which is unusual," says Ricciardi. "Most young kids are rushed."

Ricciardi, a former assistant to Oakland general manager Billy Beane, was impressed by Hinske's discipline at the plate and knowledge of the strike zone. When Ricciardi was hired by Toronto last November, one of his first moves was to deal closer Billy Koch to acquire the third baseman, whose path to the big leagues was blocked by Oakland's rising star Eric Chavez. Hinske needs to work on his defense (he's already made 15 errors), but the rebuilding Blue Jays are pleased with what they've seen so far.

"He fits a lot of things we're trying to create here," says Ricciardi. "He's a cornerstone we're trying to build around."

—Stephen Cannella

Ageless Benito Santiago

Catching Up At 37

Ponce de León never found the fountain of youth during his journey through the New World, but the Spanish explorer would have been encouraged had he come across Benito Santiago. Born and raised in the Puerto Rican coastal village of Ponce (named for its discoverer), Santiago, the 37-year-old Giants catcher, is having an All-Star-caliber season—10 years after his last midsummer classic appearance. Through Sunday, Santiago was batting .270, and among National League catchers he was second to the Mets' Mike Piazza in RBIs (38), tied for third in home runs (seven) and was fifth in runs (24).

"It's amazing for him to be at his age and to still be bouncing around like a kid back there," says Padres manager Bruce Bochy, a former catcher and teammate of Santiago's in San Diego.

After signing a two-year, $3.7 million deal with the Giants in the off-season, Santiago committed himself to a rigorous six-day-a-week workout routine. At 6' 1" and 200 pounds he retains the chiseled physique he had in '87, when he batted .300 and was the National League Rookie of the Year. Back then Santiago seemed destined for Cooperstown. During his six years in San Diego he was an All-Star four times and won three Gold Gloves.

But suddenly Santiago slid into mediocrity, largely due to a questionable work ethic and a poor attitude. He skipped extra batting practice, sparred with pitching coaches and sulked in the clubhouse. In 1993 he played with the expansion Marlins, where he hit a career-low .230, and after another year in Florida, played for three teams in three seasons.

A near-fatal car accident in January 1998, resulting in severe head injuries and a fractured vertebra, and the subsequent rehabilitation turned Santiago's career—and life—around. "I realized how much I loved the game," he says. "I've changed my attitude about a lot of things since the accident. I'm more friendly with teammates, joking around and trying to be helpful. I'm more serious about staying in shape and playing baseball."

After sitting out most of 1998, Santiago had two productive seasons platooning for the Cubs and the Reds, but his resurrection came early last season after he signed a one-year, $500,000 free-agent contract with the Giants. He became an every-day starter for the first time since 1996, hitting .262 with six homers and 45 RBIs.

There's evidence that Santiago is slipping defensively—after gunning down 34.7% of would-be base stealers last season, at week's end he had picked off 13 of 45 (28.9%) this year—but overall he is holding up well after 1,747 career games. "I have so many years back there, I know what I'm supposed to do," he says. "I can catch with my eyes closed."

—Albert Chen

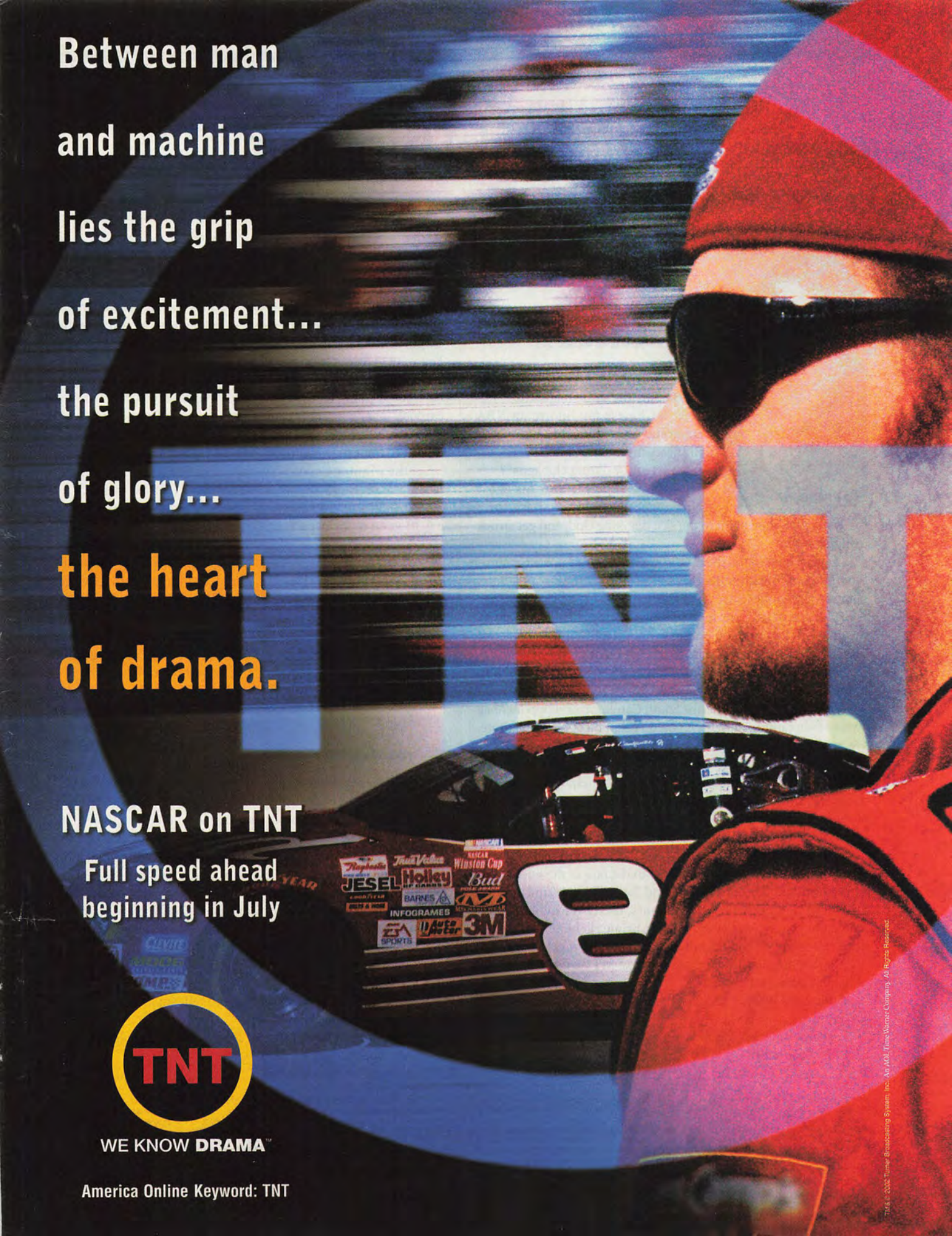
Who Owns Whom?

Barry Bonds
GIANTS

Mark Mulder
A's

Interleague play can't end soon enough for Mulder. In his three-year career the A's lefthander has faced lefthanded batters 407 times and given up just 10 home runs. But Bonds is not your typical lefty swinger. In 11 at bats against Mulder, the Giants slugger is hitting .545 with three of those 10 dingers and an obscene 1.455 slugging percentage. (Bonds's career average against lefties was .283 through Sunday.) Mulder did not pitch in the first series between the two Bay Area teams this season, but he was scheduled to face Bonds and the Giants on Friday night in Oakland, the opener of the final interleague series of the year for both teams.

AARON HARRIS/AP (HINSKE); COURTESY OF MLB (2)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Wishful Thinking

by Rick Reilly

JUST ONCE, before you die, wouldn't you *love* to see . . .

. . . Bud Selig and Donald Fehr crushed by the same meteorite?

. . . a Chinese fan inform an NBA superstar that his cool, eight-inch Chinese-character tattoo means, literally, "I enjoy dating chickens"?

. . . an NFL player beat his chest after tackling a running back for a two-yard gain, then point to the sky, thanking God, and get struck by lightning?

. . . every book publisher refuse to print Jose Canseco's autobiography on the grounds that a person must first *read* a book before writing one?

. . . a pack of jubilant football players sneak up from behind the gnarled old coach on a freezing night and dump a cooler of icy Gatorade on him, and the coach cut them on the spot?

. . . a World Cup soccer player forget what he's doing and flop to the ground during the postgame jersey swap?

. . . coach Lou Holtz describe South Carolina's next opponent as "worse than pitiful. These guys couldn't beat the Asthma Institute. We're looking *way* past them to Alabama two weeks from now"?

. . . a major league player call a press conference to demand the club negotiate his contract—downward? "I'm barely hittin' my damn weight," he'll say, his agent nodding by his side. "Either start paying me a whole lot less or I'm leaving for Pawtucket right now!"

. . . Alex Rodriguez, ahead of you in line at Wal-Mart, getting his Visa rejected?

. . . a reporter stick a tape recorder in the face of the linebacker, say, "Talk about the game, Tank," and Tank reply, "Wait a minute. You sat in that press box for 2½ hours, toasty warm, with stats handed to you, replays on 50 TV sets, prime rib buffet—with two desserts—and you can't think of *one single question* to ask me?"

. . . some megamillionaire athlete take MTV's *Cribs* on a tour of his mansion and get *lost*?

. . . Rasheed Wallace stick his hand in the air after being called for a foul?

. . . genius manager Joe Torre try to win a game with the Kansas City Royals' lineup?

. . . radio bad-boy Jim Rome say to a caller, "Hey, there's no need to be nervous. Take your time. Nobody's judging you here. You're among friends!"

. . . the superstar outfielder go on and on in a press conference about how he needs a trade closer to his home so he can drive the carpool, when his wife stands up in the back and yells, "Really? You want to drive the carpool? How about November? I hear you're pretty free then! How come you never drive the carpool in November? You're going to force a trade to Atlanta so you can drive the carpool? That'll be some trick, since we live in Orlando!"

. . . two WWF wrestlers actually land haymakers and go bawling off to their dressing rooms?

. . . the winning Super Bowl quarterback holler, "I'm going to Disney World! And after that, we're taking a *real* vacation!"

. . . a belligerent hockey fan screaming bloodthirsty insults at a 6' 6" goon in the penalty box when he suddenly realizes there's no glass between them?

> Wouldn't you love to see . . . Sergio García waggle so many times that two groups play through?

. . . Kobe Bryant's run-jump-land-and-jump-again move get called for what it is: traveling?

. . . a Wimbledon ball boy say to Pete Sampras, "Well, bloody hell, aren't you going to go pick up *any* of them?"

. . . someone on *SportsCenter* say, "Detroit defeated Atlanta 101–99," and *nothing else*?

. . . Al Davis show up at the 50-yard line in a bright blue Perry Ellis blazer, matching ascot and bleach-blond Brad Pitt bangs?

. . . Bob Costas look straight into the camera and say, "At this very moment in the Olympic Games, the women's softball final, the men's 100-meter-dash final and the excruciating finish of the marathon are all taking place. That's why it sickens me to have to send you to the three o'clock practice session of the U.S. women's gymnastics team"?

. . . all the manicured, blown-dry, poof-poof dogs at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show suddenly see a vendor spill a box of wieners and go tearing off all at once?

. . . Ahmad Rashad smear on red lipstick before sucking up to Kobe?

. . . your kids sit down to dinner and tell you about that *afternoon's* World Series game?

. . . Mo Vaughn say, "I think I'll have the salad, please."

. . . the puck? □

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